This Time Is Different. Facebook’s Issue Is More Pervasive

|
59 mins ago
Over a thousand brands have pulled their ad spend from Facebook—including the likes of Unilever, Coke and The North Face—to protest the hate speech that has proliferated on the platform. Brands have protested social media platforms this way before. Nestle and others stopped spending on YouTube in 2019 after harmful comments were found on the site.

This time, it really is different. Facebook’s issue is more pervasive. Brands are more serious. Outside social organizations such as the NAACP are steering the conversation. And the public is more aware of the problem. In this situation, brands have a tremendous amount of power, and, as the saying goes, “With great power comes great responsibility.”

Brands can’t go back unless Facebook changes

When prominent brands pulled spending from YouTube as problems with content management emerged, YouTube was quick to respond with apologies and promises to improve, which they largely have. Brands were able to resume their spend without much public backlash, and the industry conclusion was that brands needed to become comfortable with user-generated content, which would never be 100% brand-safe.

This time, the problem is not with a few videos or comments hidden in a corner of the platform. Rather, it is a pervasive

problem at the highest levels and Facebook isn't apologizing. Instead, founder Mark Zuckerberg has repeatedly suggested that the platform should remain hands-off, even as content veers from fringe politics to overtly inciting hatred and violence. This is more than a brand-safety issue. This is an issue that touches on free speech and public safety. Even lawyers hired by the company reportedly announced that the company was doing too little on civil rights.

But as the platform loses its shine, brands will start to re-evaluate how they measure Facebook's value and will find that their new media plan offers benefits of its own.
With spending still climbing back from a low point due to the Covid-19 crisis, some brands may determine that now is an opportune time to protest something they have long been concerned about without having to worry about having a magnifying glass pointed at the effect on their overall performance. That may be true, but it is not a reason to dismiss the power of their collective action.

In a recent IAB call, many participants noted that brands and agencies were aggressively working to shift their Facebook media budget to new channels, looking to fundamentally alter their ongoing media mix planning and execution. Another signal that this time is different: Advertisers are not planning a mere pause in spending until Facebook potentially makes a few concessions in a week or two. Advertisers are working hard to prepare for a new way to buy media that doesn't rely as heavily (or at all) on Facebook. This is a concerted effort that likely would not have been launched if not for the political and ethical issues plaguing the platform.

Brands that have made public stands know that they will not be able to go back to Facebook until the platform makes major changes. The stakes are too high, and the story is too public. Brands that return prematurely will see negative brand effects that cut much deeper than what they have dealt with in the past.

The spark that started a fire

Now that global brands have started leaving Facebook, smaller businesses are joining them. For all of these brands, reduced spend or not, Facebook has been a foundational element in their media plan. But as the platform loses its shine, brands will start to reevaluate how they measure Facebook's value and will find that their new media plan offers benefits of its own.

Social platforms that allow the proliferation of hate speech bring to light the importance of context, something that many brands have long ignored on programmatic advertising. Despite decades of studies proving the value of contextual adjacency, brands have been too enticed by conversion rates and CPM prices to properly account for contextual relevance.

Continue Reading

Pages: 1 2

https://www.adweek.com/programmatic/this-time-is-different-facebooks-issue-is-more-pervasive/