

Political Advertising Year in Review: Pressure Builds on Digital Ad Sellers

Article

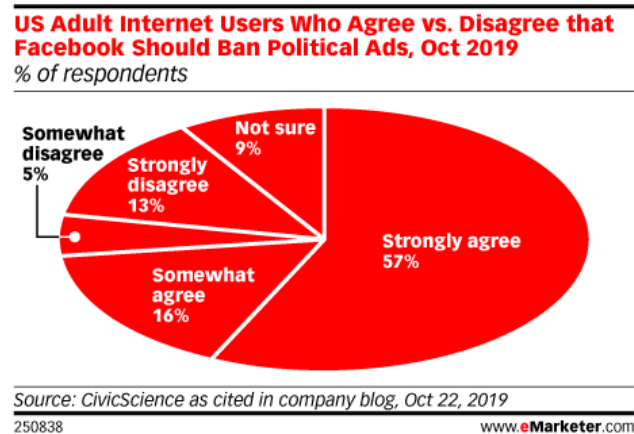
The first primary contests for the Democratic presidential nomination are not happening until February 2020, but the heat is already on the biggest digital ad sellers to restrict

what they allow political and issue-oriented advertisers to do.

In November 2019, **Google announced it would allow political advertisers** to use only three types of audience targeting when buying media: age, gender and location down to the ZIP code level. Contextual targeting is also still allowed, but other types of audience targeting, including retargeting and behavioral targeting, have been shut down for these types of advertisers—first in the UK, ahead of their parliamentary elections, and soon to follow elsewhere worldwide.

That announcement came after Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey **announced in a Twitter thread** that the microblogging service would be disallowing all types of political and issue-related advertising—a position the company later **backtracked on**, saying it would **allow cause-oriented ads from registered buyers**.

Twitter’s move was widely **hailed as a PR victory** because of the widespread popularity among consumers of banning political ads. In an October 2019 poll from researcher **CivicScience**, 69% of US adult internet users agreed with Twitter's decision at least somewhat—including a majority (56%) who agreed strongly. Responses were similar when respondents were asked whether Facebook should ban political ads.



In a June 2019 survey by over-the-top (OTT) video service **Sling TV** and video-focused supply-side platform (SSP) **Telaria**, almost two-thirds of US internet users ages 18 to 29 had negative opinions of political ads on social media, with the most common description among respondents being “untrustworthy.” Only 6% characterized political ads on social media as “honest,” though more were willing to say they were “informative.”

How Do US Internet Users Ages 18-29 Describe Social Media Political Advertising?

% of respondents, June 2019

Negative

Untrustworthy 37%

Deceitful 18%

8% Fraudulent

Total 63%

Positive

Informative 27%

6% Honest

4% Reliable

Total 37%

Source: Sling TV and Telaria, "Connected GenZennials: The CTV-First Generation's Impact on the 2020 Elections," Aug 7, 2019

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It's important to note that people are hostile to political ads nearly everywhere. CivicScience found that more than two-thirds of respondents also thought these **types of ads should be banned on TV**. And it's not just about ads, either: Last November, CivicScience asked internet users how they felt about political posts on Facebook, and 54% agreed **with the statement**, "I would gladly do away with all political posts on Facebook if I could."

Of course, many respondents would probably like to ban certain political posts—the ones they don't like—while allowing others they do like, or consider uncontroversial. The general media environment in the US has been highly polarized for years now, and partisans of all stripes continue to engage with this type of content and advertising. In other words, it's still successful, so it's not likely to stop anytime soon.

Kantar Media expects US digital political ad spending to reach \$1.2 billion next year, or 20.0% of political ad spending. **Advertising Analytics** and **Cross Screen Media** expect \$1.60 billion in US political ad spending on digital video placements alone next year.