

Facebook Advertisements and United States Presidential Campaigns

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CPSC 610: Topics in Computer Science and Law

Professor Feigenbaum

December 21, 2019

Introduction

Brad Parscale, the digital director of President Donald Trump's campaign, issued the following statement in an interview with *60 Minutes*: "I understood early that Facebook was how Donald Trump was going to win. Twitter is how he talked to the people. Facebook was going to be how he won."¹ By providing a platform for mass advertisement targeting, Facebook has shaped the landscape of United States presidential campaigning. Following success in 2016, the Trump campaign announced its intent to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on online strategy for the 2020 election.² With automated microtargeting, politicians can (and do) produce tens of thousands of iterations of the same ad, tailoring minute details such as button color and word choice to user preferences with the end goal of influencing behavior.³ Facebook publicly boasts the benefits of microtargeting to political campaigns. Following Senator Toomey's 2016 senatorial campaign, Facebook posted a "success story" on the use of a "made-for-Facebook, audience-specific content strategy to significantly shift voter intent."⁴ Political advertising on Facebook will undoubtedly affect voter behavior in the upcoming presidential race. Therefore, the technical and legal frameworks that dictate political advertisements on Facebook warrant discussion and critique.

Overview of Political Advertisements on Facebook

Facebook subjects advertisements about politics, elections, and social issues to the same regulations. The former two categories encompass any content regulated as political advertising,

¹Lesley Stahl, "Facebook 'Embeds,' Russia and the Trump Campaign's Secret Weapon," *60 Minutes*, October 8, 2017.

² Thomas Kaplan and Sarah Almukhatur, "How Trump Is Outspending Every 2020 Democrat on Facebook," *The New York Times*, May 21, 2019.

³ Stahl, "Facebook 'Embeds.'"

⁴ "Toomey for Senate," Facebook Business (Facebook), accessed December 21, 2019.

including advertisements run “by, on behalf of, or about” any political figure or party and advertisements advocating for or against a specific “election, referendum, or ballot initiative.”⁵ Working alongside the Comparative Agendas Project, a non-partisan organization that curates political topics, Facebook has formed a list of social issues to include in its policy.⁶ The issues run the gamut from guns to environmental politics, and only advertisements “trying to achieve a political purpose” are subject to additional constraints.⁷ For example, an advertisement for gun sales would not fall under the same policy as a message advocating tighter restrictions on gun control. Facebook has published a list of issues, alongside descriptions and examples of what constitutes a political agenda under each category.⁸ In order to enforce the policy, content reviewers consider the images, text, target audience, and, when relevant, landing page of an advertisement. Users can report unmarked political advertisements that slip past fact-checkers. Facebook acknowledges the definitional problem of the term “political advertisement,” accepting that the company will suffer criticism surrounding the content that it chooses to regulate.⁹ While the definitions of each issue provide a certain degree of transparency, they all feature the phrase “including but not limited to.”¹⁰ The vagueness raises concerns surrounding bias, allowing Facebook to enforce or lift its policy on issues advertisements at will.

⁵ “About Ads about Social Issues, Elections or Politics,” Facebook for Business (Facebook), accessed December 31, 2019.

⁶ Katie Harbath and Steve Satterfield, “Hard Questions: Why Doesn’t Facebook Just Ban Political Ads?,” Facebook Newsroom (Facebook, May 24, 2018).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “How Ads About Social Issues, Elections or Politics Are Reviewed (With Examples),” Facebook for Business (Facebook), accessed December 30, 2019.

⁹ Harbath and Satterfield, “Hard Questions: Why Doesn’t Facebook Just Ban Political Ads?”

¹⁰ “How Ads About Social Issues, Elections or Politics Are Reviewed (With Examples).”

In order to run political or issues advertisements on Facebook, publishers must undergo a verification process. First, the page admin must provide a valid United States mailing address and ID. Facebook works with third-party service providers to verify advertisers' identities. In addition to the admin, anyone "creating, modifying, publishing or pausing ads about social issues, elections or politics" must undergo the same process.¹¹ To address advertisers who do not identify their content as political, Facebook has started developing "machine learning tools."¹² Before running an advertisement, Facebook reviews it with "a combination of artificial intelligence (AI) and human review."¹³ Users additionally have the option to report political content. If an advertiser feels that Facebook has incorrectly flagged their content, they have the option to appeal the decision.¹⁴ However, organizations based outside of the United States can still run political and issues advertisements as long as they have one cooperating admin who lives in the United States and can provide the necessary identification. Moreover, beyond nebulous statements, the review process remains opaque. The company appeals to buzz words such as "artificial intelligence" and "machine learning" without disclosing the details of detection systems and the rules provided to third-party content moderators. In discussing political advertisements, mainstream media largely neglects to acknowledge the difficulty of developing unbiased classification systems for political content, a challenge relevant to any policy that regulates or bans political advertisements.

¹¹ "Get Authorized to Run Ads about Social Issues, Elections or Politics," Facebook for Business (Facebook), accessed January 1, 2020.

¹² Anthony Ha, "Facebook Says Its Ad Transparency Features Will Go Live Next Month," TechCrunch, October 27, 2017.

¹³ "How Ads About Social Issues, Elections or Politics Are Reviewed (With Examples)."

¹⁴ Ibid.

Since May 2018, Facebook has required that all political advertisements include a “Paid For” disclosure.¹⁵ Clicking on the label redirects to information on the advertisement’s budget, number of views, and viewer demographics.¹⁶ Since its conception, the “Paid For” feature has faced controversy. In a conversation with TechCrunch reporter Josh Constine, a Facebook representative confirmed that the page admin responsible for purchasing the advertisement chooses the name to appear on the label. Facebook expects purchasers to report honestly and in adherence with all relevant laws; however, in deferring the burden to advertisers, Facebook’s policy risks exploitation.¹⁷ In October 2018, VICE News purchased Facebook advertisements “paid for” by Vice President Mike Pence, Democratic National Committee Chairman Tom Perez, and even the Islamic State.¹⁸ While initial verification required a valid ID and proof of residence, the news outlet faced little friction in listing fake sponsors thereafter.¹⁹ Even when accurately represented, shell organizations such as political action committees often have ambiguous names that conceal the true sponsors behind political advertisements.²⁰

In 2018, Facebook introduced a public archive containing all advertisements on the platform. Each advertisement persists in the Ad Library for seven years alongside information including the number of impressions, the amount spent, and aggregate statistics on the age, gender, and location of the advertisement’s audience. Users can search the library by keywords

¹⁵ William Turton, “Facebook’s Political AD Tool Let Us Buy Ads ‘Paid for’ by Mike Pence and ISIS,” Vice News, October 5, 2018.

¹⁶ Rob Leathern, “Shining a Light on Ads With Political Content,” Facebook Newsroom (Facebook, May 24, 2018).

¹⁷ Josh Constine, “Facebook and Instagram Launch US Political Ad Labeling and Archive,” TechCrunch, May 24, 2018.

¹⁸ Turton, “Facebook’s Political AD Tool Let Us Buy Ads ‘Paid for’ by Mike Pence and ISIS.”

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Constine, “Facebook and Instagram Launch US Political Ad Labeling and Archive.”

or specific Page names. Only political and issues advertisements appear in keyword searches.²¹ Subject to a review process, independent scholars can receive funding and access to “privacy-protected datasets” for the purpose of conducting research on social media and elections.²² A commission of scholars, selected by Facebook “in consultation with the foundations funding the initiative,” develops the “research agenda,” solicits proposals, and issues grants.²³ Facebook waives the right to review findings before publication. The company acknowledges that the new initiative recalls the recent Cambridge Analytica scandal, but nonetheless upholds that the benefits of supporting independent research outweigh the risks. In order to safeguard against data abuse, Facebook’s privacy and research review teams conduct investigations. Furthermore, the initiative only accepts proposals that have undergone review by the International Review Board or an equivalent international organization. The commission works alongside researchers during the publication process to guarantee that “only aggregated, anonymized results are reported.”²⁴

Facebook does not allow content designed to suppress voting, “offers to buy or sell votes,” and content containing false information on how, where, or when to vote.²⁵ In reporting a post or advertisement on Facebook, users can select “Incorrect Voting Info” as a justification.²⁶ As per usual, Facebook works alongside third-party fact-checkers to determine whether a piece of content constitutes voter suppression. If so, Facebook demotes the post and attaches a note

²¹ “About the Ad Library,” Facebook for Business (Facebook), accessed January 1, 2020.

²² Elliot Schrage and David Ginsberg, “Facebook Launches New Initiative to Help Scholars Assess Social Media’s Impact on Elections,” Facebook Newsroom (Facebook, April 19, 2018).

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Jessica Leinwand, “Expanding Our Policies on Voter Suppression,” Facebook Newsroom (Facebook, October 15, 2018), <https://about.fb.com/news/2018/10/voter-suppression-policies/>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

from the fact-checker.²⁷ Beyond piecemeal examples and appeals to third-party partners, Facebook has not issued a statement on how it identifies advertisements intended to suppress voting.

Company Policies on Political Advertisements

Although this paper focuses on Facebook's treatment of political advertisements, current media discussions define Facebook's practices in opposition to those of competitors such as Google and Twitter. In this section, I will discuss the policies of the three companies, as well as prevalent reactions to and opinions on the companies' frameworks.

Facebook

Facebook relies on third-party fact-checkers to “reduce the spread of false news” on the platform.²⁸ If a politician shares a link, image, or video already deemed counterfactual, then Facebook will demote the post. However, neither organic content nor advertisements posted by politicians pass through the filter of a third-party fact-checker.²⁹ In reiterating the company's policy, Nick Clegg, Facebook's Vice-President for Global Affairs and Communications, argued that Facebook should not “referee political debates and prevent a politician's speech from reaching its audience and being subject to public debate and scrutiny.”³⁰ Clegg furthermore reminded listeners that a newsworthiness exemption has existed since 2016, allowing the persistence of content in violation with Facebook standards so long as “the public interest in

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Adam Mosseri, “Working to Stop Misinformation and False News,” Facebook for Media (Facebook, April 7, 2017).

²⁹ Nick Clegg, “Facebook, Elections and Political Speech,” Facebook Newsroom (Facebook, September 24, 2019).

³⁰ Ibid.

seeing it outweighs the risk of harm.”³¹ As of September 24, 2019, all organic content posted by politicians qualifies under the exemption.³²

In plain terms, the newsworthiness exemption sanctions Facebook to forego their Community Standards in chosen cases. Besides fragmentary announcements, no publicly available framework dictates what does and does not qualify as newsworthy; rather, the company appeals to opaque “new tools and approaches to enforcement.”³³ While the exemption affords Facebook the flexibility to conform to social movements, the lack of specificity raises red flags, especially regarding sociopolitical content. While all speech posted by politicians qualifies as newsworthy, content produced by other adjacent groups and figures occupies a gray area. Through the newsworthiness exemption, Facebook has the opportunity to exercise bias by arbitrating what content does and does not align with “the public interest.” Therefore, the company should incur a higher level of accountability with respect to the newsworthiness exemption. For example, the platform could introduce a newsworthiness exemption label that links to information on Facebook’s decision, alongside a searchable database of newsworthy content. The new label and library could look and function similarly to Facebook’s preexisting “Paid For” disclosure and Ad Library.

The company heralds its policy as an active attempt to promote “free speech and political discourse,” denying allegations of financial motives on the grounds that political advertisements are projected to compose only 0.5% of revenue in 2020.³⁴ Facebook points to the costs that the

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Joel Kaplan and Justin Osofsky, “Input From Community and Partners On Our Community Standards,” Facebook Newsroom (Facebook, October 21, 2016).

³⁴ Josh Constine, “Zuckerberg Defends Politician Ads That Will Be 0.5% of 2020 Revenue,” *TechCrunch*, October 30, 2019.

company will incur by policing political advertisements as proof of social, rather than monetary, motivations.³⁵ Opponents to Facebook’s policy argue that the platform’s design yields a responsibility to combat fake news. Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow point out that “the format of social media—thin slices of information viewed on phones or news feed windows—can make it difficult to judge an article’s veracity.”³⁶ Facebook claims that “people spend, on average, 1.7 seconds with a piece of content on mobile compared to 2.5 seconds on desktop.”³⁷ In such a short time frame, the platform cannot expect users to debate and vet out false content. Statistics show that misinformation providers benefit from social media platforms—while top news outlets receive 10% of their traffic from social media referrals, “fake news websites rely on social media for a much higher share of their traffic.”³⁸ Within the current political landscape, the lack of fact-checking on political advertisements advantages certain candidates more than others; Allcott and Gentzkow count “115 pro-Trump fake stories that were shared on Facebook a total of 30 million times, and 41 pro-Clinton fake stories shared a total of 7.6 million times.”³⁹ Therefore, the question of bias implicit in Facebook’s policy arises.

In a Twitter post, 2020 candidate Elizabeth Warren ardently voiced her opposition to Facebook’s update. Warren views Facebook’s treatment of political advertisements as a manifestation of Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg’s bias, pointing out the proximity of Clegg’s announcement to a meeting between Zuckerberg and Trump. Furthermore, in a leaked soundbite,

³⁵ Harbath and Satterfield, “Hard Questions: Why Doesn’t Facebook Just Ban Political Ads?”

³⁶ Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31, no. 2 (2017): 2.

³⁷ “Capturing Attention in Feed: The Science Behind Effective Video Creative,” Facebook for Business (Facebook, April 20, 2016).

³⁸ Allcott and Gentzkow, “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election.”

³⁹ *Ibid*, 212.

Zuckerberg called Warren an existential threat to the company.⁴⁰ Warren articulates the power that Facebook yields over presidential elections and, as a result, insists upon accountability. She proposes that “Congress and the appropriate state authorities” conduct investigations and demand explanations from Facebook executives on “the company’s policies and practices.”⁴¹ However, Warren’s post misframes Facebook’s policy change, claiming that “Facebook quietly changed its policies on ‘misinformation’ in ads, allowing politicians to run ads that have already been debunked by independent, non-partisan fact-checkers.”⁴² However, the fact-checking policy has existed for over a year—rather, Clegg reiterated the existing policy on fact-checking and announced the update to the newsworthiness exemption. In discussing policies on fact-checking and politicians’ speech, Clegg explicitly stated that Facebook has “had this policy on the books for over a year now, posted publicly on our site under our eligibility guidelines.”⁴³

I believe that advertisements run by politicians should undergo the same fact-checking processes as other advertisements. It is unreasonable to expect users to scrutinize and debate the accuracy of all content—sometimes false yet catchy headlines, seen in passing, can influence opinions. Facebook relies on the vague tenet of “political discourse” to support its policy. However, even with a false content label, the posts and advertisements could still generate the same amount of conversation, if not more. It seems unnecessary to have users debate content veracity when non-partisan third-party fact-checkers can provide a clear answer. Since political advertisements run by presidential candidates have the potential to impact election results, inaccurate content can produce misinformed voters.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Warren, Twitter Post, October 7, 2019, 4:21 PM.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Clegg, “Facebook, Elections and Political Speech.”

Twitter

On October 30, 2019, in close proximity to Facebook’s policy announcement, Twitter released a total ban on political advertisements to be enforced by “a combination of automated technology and human teams.”⁴⁴ Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey upholds the opinion that “political message reach should be earned, not bought.”⁴⁵ Parscale has been particularly vocal against Twitter’s policy update, labeling the announcement as “yet another attempt to silence conservatives, since Twitter knows President Trump has the most sophisticated online program ever known.”⁴⁶

However, the ban gives the upper hand to the incumbent and to candidates who have the funds to run costly television and radio advertisements. Dorsey states that “we have witnessed many social movements reach massive scale without any political advertising. I trust this will only grow.”⁴⁷ While movements can still gain reach, banning political advertisements presents a hurdle to the achievement of widespread recognition. Less expensive than television or radio messaging, social media advertisements allow candidates new to the field to gain reach. At the same time, they advantage wealthy candidates by increasing the mileage of every dollar spent. Twitter has little to lose from banning political advertisements—during the United States midterm elections in 2018, the platform sold only \$3 million of political advertisements.⁴⁸ Critics

⁴⁴ Sheila Dang and Paresh Dave, “Twitter Tightens Bans on Political Ads and Causes Ahead of 2020 U.S. Election,” Reuters, November 15, 2019.

⁴⁵ Jack Dorsey, Twitter Post, October 30, 2019, 1:05 PM.

⁴⁶ Kendall Carson and Matt Zarrell, “Twitter Outlines Sweeping Details of Ban on Political Ads,” ABC News, November 15, 2019.

⁴⁷ Dorsey, Twitter Post.

⁴⁸ Dang and Dave, “Twitter Tightens Bans on Political Ads and Causes.”

therefore cast the policy update off as a publicity stunt rather than a bold, socially motivated decision.

Google

Google has opted for a more moderate policy than its competitors. In opposition to Facebook, Google forbids misinformation in all advertisements. Nonetheless, the company acknowledges the difficulty in identifying false content, especially with respect to sensitive political topics. Currently, Google offers targeting for election advertisements based on broad categories, such as political affiliation, but not “granular microtargeting.”⁴⁹ Starting January 6, 2020, Google will limit targeting to age, gender, and postal code. Contextual targeting (e.g. targeting users viewing content on a specific topic) still remains an option. In the announcement, Google compares itself to television and radio, which both feature widely available, contextually targeted advertisements for elections.⁵⁰ The comparison ignores pertinent differences—television and radio providers do not have access to personal age and gender data and, given the specificity of internet content in comparison to television and radio counterparts, context provides Google with more targeting information. Furthermore, given the comparison, Google should face more regulation than it does as a technology platform. However, like Facebook, Google has independently decided to produce a public, searchable transparency report, providing information required of television and radio advertisements by law.⁵¹ I will describe the legal framework dictating disclosures on radio and television advertisements at length later in this paper. In mimicking, at least to an extent, established television and radio practices, Google

⁴⁹ Scott Spencer, “An Update on Our Political Ads Policy,” The Keyword (Google, November 20, 2019).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

fends off calls for legislation. Nonetheless, Google's policy provides less established candidates with a voice and the opportunity to gain reach without microtargeting to manipulate behavior. However, candidates might funnel more money into election advertisements on Facebook given the total absence of microtargeting on Google.

Digital Political Advertising Laws

Current Regulatory framework

Since its establishment in 1975, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) has overseen the application of federal campaign finance law. In particular, the FEC's mission centers around the enforcement of the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) of 1971, the primary piece of legislation governing election fundraising and spending.⁵² The FECA specifies regulations on political advertisement disclosures, requiring that all electioneering communications, as well as public communications that either solicit contributions or advocate for or against the election of a specific candidate, disclose who paid for and authorized the publication. Political committee websites, public communications, and email communications similarly require disclosures.⁵³ The term "public communication" encompasses content on mass platforms such as television and radio, while "electioneering communication" references broadcast, cable or satellite communications that refer to a candidate within 30 days of a primary or 60 days of a general election.⁵⁴ Because the FECA predates the rise of internet advertisements, neither definition encompasses advertisements on technology platforms. Therefore, political advertisements on

⁵² "Mission and History," Federal Election Commission, accessed January 3, 2020.

⁵³ "Communications; Advertising; Disclaimers," Legal Information Institute (Cornell Law School), accessed January 3, 2020.

⁵⁴ "Special Notices on Political Ads and Solicitations." *Special Notices on Political Ads and Solicitations*. Washington, DC, 2006.

Facebook, Google, and Twitter do not have to adhere to the same transparency standards as television and radio advertisements.

The Honest Ads Act

The Honest Ads Act is a bipartisan bill intended to regulate online political advertising with the goal of preventing foreign interference in United States elections, proposing that online political advertisements be subject to the same standards as radio and television advertisements. In a recent study, the Pew Research Center found that 65% of Americans turned to internet-based platforms for their primary source of information in the 2016 election. While the public nature of television and radio encourages “the press, fact-checkers, and political opponents” to scrutinize political content, temporary and private micro-targeted political advertisements make misinformation more difficult to detect.⁵⁵ Because of the pertinence of internet advertisements to United States elections, as well as their susceptibility to misinformation, the Honest Ads Act demands increased transparency.

The bill suggests amending the definition of “public communication” and “electioneering communication” to encompass paid internet and digital communications.⁵⁶ If passed, the bill would necessitate platforms with a minimum of 50,000 visitors per month to maintain a public record on every person or group spending at least \$500 per month on political advertisements. The file would include “a digital copy of the advertisement, a description of the audience the advertisement targets, the number of views generated, the dates and times of publication, the rates charged, and the contact information of the purchaser.”⁵⁷ Additionally, the bill demands that

⁵⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Honest Ads Act*, S 1989, 115th Cong., 1st sess., introduced in Senate October 19, 2017.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ “The Honest Ads Act,” Mark R. Warner, accessed January 2, 2020.

television, radio, and technology companies make “reasonable efforts” to prevent foreign nationals from purchasing political advertisements, both directly and indirectly.⁵⁸ The bill refers to Russian interference on “the Nation’s largest social media platform” and references the “reach of a few large internet platforms,” indicating an intent to regulate a handful of technology companies without calling out specific names.⁵⁹

However, the \$500 limit risks exploitation. A person or group could create several accounts that each spend the designated monthly amount on advertisements. Without robust tools to identify accounts created by the same person or group, the restriction would only present a minor hurdle to advertisers who want to spend more than \$500 on political advertisements while avoiding a public record. Democratic Senator Mark Warner, one of the brains behind the bill, admits to the difficulty of identifying multiple accounts backed by the same person or group. In order to solve the problem, Warner turns to the tech companies, announcing his “[hopes] that these platform companies come up with some ideas.”⁶⁰ Regarding foreign interference, the bill’s call for “reasonable efforts” to prevent foreign actors from running political advertisements lacks the specificity to effectively bring about change.

Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg has pointed out similarities between the Honest Ads Act and Facebook’s Ad Library.⁶¹ In certain domains, Facebook even exceeds the regulations proposed in the bill; for example, entries persist in the Ad Library for seven years rather than the proposed four. Furthermore, the Ad Library constitutes a public record on all

⁵⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Honest Ads Act*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Taylor Hatmaker, “Bipartisan Bill Seeks to Regulate Political Ads on Facebook, Twitter and Google,” *TechCrunch*, October 19, 2017.

⁶¹ Kiley Roache, “Sandberg Says U.S. 2020 Election Is Facebook’s Highest Priority,” *Bloomberg*, November 7, 2019.

advertisements, not just those purchased by individuals or groups whose spending exceeds \$500 per month. While the Ad Library increases transparency surrounding political advertising on the platform, Facebook's cooperation with the Honest Ads Act might prevent the enactment of laws governing political advertisements, giving leeway to other companies with more opaque practices. Moreover, by fending off legislation, Facebook gains the ability to alter their policies surrounding political advertisements at will. Without regulations that govern political advertisements, the company has free reign. After refining the aforementioned ambiguities, the enactment of the Honest Ads Act could result in more consistent and transparent processes surrounding political advertisements on technology platforms.

Conclusion

Given the influence of Facebook political advertisements in presidential elections, it becomes essential to understand the underlying technical and legal processes and to recognize their weaknesses. For starters, terms such as "political advertisement" and "issues advertisement," as well as the subcategories that fall within, have vague definitions, allowing Facebook flexibility in the implementation of its policy. While requiring a valid United States ID and address to run political advertisement introduces a safeguard against foreign interference, a determined adversary could subvert the policy with the cooperation of a United States national. Moreover, the processes for catching unidentified political advertisements remain obscure to the public, dictated by mysterious machine learning algorithms and third-party fact-checkers.

The lack of fact-checking on politicians' speech has the potential to produce a misinformed public, especially given the rapid content consumption encouraged by Facebook's design. Furthermore, it deals an unfair advantage to President Trump, who has historically

benefited from spreading fake news on the social media platform. Facebook's vague newsworthiness exemption allows the company to forego their policies and exercise bias. I propose a greater degree of transparency, such as a public archive of newsworthy content, equipped with explanations on Facebook's decision making. Twitter's antithetical policy, a total ban on political advertisements, neglects the benefits of political advertising: the possibilities afforded to less established candidates. Google's policy occupies a nuanced middle ground, allowing for widespread advertising without microtargeting. However, given competitors' policies, Facebook emerges as the clear leader in the political advertising space, which might lead to more widespread political microtargeting on the platform.

Under the current legal framework, internet political advertisements face fewer constraints than radio and television alternatives. Given the comparative reach of social media advertisements, as well as their influence over elections, I argue that they should face the same degree of regulation. The Honest Ads Act, an unenacted bill, proposes such a change. However, the bill contains blatant ambiguities, deferring decisions on technical components to major technology platforms. In particular, the bill contains little information on how to prevent foreign interference, and its \$500 monthly spending limit could be bypassed without sophisticated systems to detect the true source of political advertisements. Facebook has, to an extent, adhered to the changes proposed by the Honest Ads Act through the Ad Library; however, the efforts of a single company should not deter regulation. The lack of legislation surrounding online political advertisement gives technology platforms unabridged control over their practices, leaving the future of online political advertising up in the air.

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