Facebook's Ad Policy Is Hurting Efforts to Raise Awareness of HIV and Hep C

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There was much hullabaloo in response to a recent New York Times headline announcing Facebook wouldn't block political ads containing factually incorrect information.

The piece titled "Facebook's Hands-Off Approach to Political Speech Gets Impeachment Test" reported that staffers with the campaign of Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden asked Facebook to take down a Trump campaign ad they said was full of false accusations.

The NYT piece went on to say:

> In a letter to the Biden campaign, Facebook said the ad, which has been viewed five million times on the site, did not violate company policies. Last month, the social network, which has more than two billion users, announced that politicians and their campaigns had nearly free rein over content they post there.

It went downhill from there as the company's cofounder and CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, testified before Congress that Facebook basically allows politicians to run false ads on the platform.

In case you missed it, watch the revealing exchange between Zuckerberg and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez below:

> "So, you won't take down lies or you will take down lies?

I think that’s just a pretty simple yes or no.”

Complete exchange between @RepAOC @AOC and Mark Zuckerberg at today’s House Financial Services Committee hearing.

Full video here: https://t.co/heT7Psnlp1

pic.twitter.com/0iiWtfU5gQ

— CSPAN (@cspan) October 23, 2019

As news was breaking about Facebook’s stance on political ads, the company was busy blocking campaigns running on POZ.com and our sister site HepMag.com.

What was blocked? A slideshow about celebrities who have lived with HIV (that included a slide about the late actor Robert Reed, aka Mike Brady, the patriarch on the hit sitcom The Brady Brunch) and a post about actress Pamela Anderson announcing to the world she is hepatitis C–free.

What could possibly be Facebook’s reason for blocking our ads? The note from Facebook in both cases said the the boosting of the posts was being blocked because they were “Low Quality.”

At first, we thought maybe it was just a mistake on the part of some Facebook autobots, but no. A manual review by the social media platform had deemed both posts unworthy of Facebook boosting.

We then tried boosting them as political ads. As POZ recently reported, Apicha Community Health Center had its ads promoting PrEP temporarily blocked because they were deemed political. That wasn't it either, as both our posts were rejected again.

The Facebook notice we received lists suggestions for getting the ads reinstated, including "ensure landing page contains sufficient original content and avoids disruptive experiences." So we revisited the content.

We didn't see anything out of line. We weren't lying like some of the political ads approved on the platform were. Not too many ads. Plenty of interesting and engaging pictures and text. Plus, plenty of other publishers were boosting similar content on Facebook.

So now we've landed in this very uncomfortable place. Our posts featuring Robert Reed (aka Mr. Brady) and Pam Anderson are battling Donald Trump political ads on Facebook and losing badly. But the real losers here are the folks who won't learn that Rudy Galindo, Javier Muñoz, Charlie Sheen, Greg Louganis and other icons are living with HIV, since they won't see our celebrity slideshow.

As long as HIV stigma persists, we need to persevere with HIV awareness. After all, with or without HIV, life expectancy is nearly the same. And the reality of Undetectable Equals Untransmittable (U=U) means there is no risk of passing along the virus.

Whatever side of the political fence you’re on, there is a very real cost to the American people when factual information loses out to the whims of Facebook executives deciding what can and can’t be promoted on a platform that billions of people use every day.

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