

## Third of advertisers may boycott Facebook in hate speech revolt

*'Stop Hate for Profit' campaign gathers momentum as ad boycott spreads outside US*

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Ford and Adidas have joined Honda, Verizon, Diageo and Unilever in announcing their intention to halt all advertising on Facebook until the end of July. Photograph: Olivier Douliery/AFP/Getty

Almost a third of advertisers are considering joining a month-long boycott of Facebook as the social network struggles to convince advertisers that it is doing enough to fight hate speech on its platform.

5 The unprecedented corporate snub has been revealed in survey by the World Federation of Advertisers, whose big-spending members control nearly \$100bn (£81bn) in spending.

The survey showed that a third of the top 58 advertisers will, or are likely to, suspend advertising, while a further 40% are also considering doing so.

On Monday, Ford and Adidas announced their intention to halt all advertising on the platform, joining corporations including Honda, Verizon, Diageo and Unilever.

10 Others, including Starbucks and Coca-Cola, have paused all advertising on social media but stopped short of officially announcing support for the "Stop Hate for Profit" campaign, which is coordinating the Facebook boycott.

15 The boycott is also spreading outside the US. On Tuesday, Britvic, the owner of drinks brands including Fruit Shoot and Robinsons, said it was suspending all advertising on Facebook platforms next month, and called on the social media platform “to take stronger actions against harmful content and misinformation on its platform”.

VW said it was also joining the boycott, along with Honda Europe and Ford Europe. The French state-owned utility EDF, which owns EDF Energy and is the company behind the construction of the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant, has also vetoed Facebook advertising.

20 A Ford spokesman said: “We are pausing all US and European social media advertising for the next 30 days to re-evaluate our presence on these platforms. The existence of content that includes hate speech, violence and racial injustice on social platforms needs to be eradicated.”

A Honda Europe spokesman added that the decision was “in alignment with our company’s values, which are grounded in human respect”.

25 Confectionery group Mars said it was halting its social media advertising across all platforms until further notice. In a statement to the Guardian, the company said: “Social media platforms play an important role in society, but equally, they have a powerful role to play in stopping the spread of hate speech and misinformation.

30 “There is no room for discrimination in a healthy society. Mars has a responsibility and an opportunity to make a meaningful and measurable difference in the fight against racism, hate, violence and discrimination – we expect all of the social media platform partners we work with to do the same.”

Stephan Loerke, chief executive of the World Federation of Advertisers, told the Financial Times the advertising industry was starting to request big changes from social media platforms. 35 “In all candour,” he said, “it feels like a turning point.”

In an internal post on Monday reported by Axios, Microsoft revealed it had suspended all US spending on Facebook platforms in May, and had since expanded the move globally. Like Starbucks, Microsoft has not publicly endorsed the wider campaign; in the internal messaging, its chief marketing officer, Chris Capossela, told colleagues: “Our experience tells us that the most 40 impactful means to effect genuine, long-term change is through direct dialogue and meaningful action with our media partners, including the suspension of real marketing dollars.”

The “Stop Hate for Profit” boycott is promoted by a coalition of US-based non-profits and calls for companies to suspend their spending on the platform for the month of July.

45 However, many companies, including Microsoft, had already dropped their ad spend, while some, such as Unilever, have announced their intention to continue the boycott well past the end of July, until after the US election in November or beyond.

Some advertisers are additionally motivated by a desire to preserve “brand safety”, objecting to their promotional material appearing next to inappropriate content. Capossela of Microsoft, for instance, cited “hate speech, pornography, terrorist content, etc”, as examples that concerned his 50 company.