

# Facebook gets bad grades on report card from civil rights groups behind advertising boycott

13 August 2020, by Jessica Guynn, Usa Today



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Civil rights groups behind the #StopHateForProfit boycott are giving Facebook poor grades on its response, saying the company failed to address or fell short of addressing the coalition's demands.

In a [report card](#) sent to advertisers and released exclusively to U.S. TODAY, the coalition makes the case that Facebook hasn't taken meaningful steps to stop the spread of hate speech on its platforms.

"We put out an assessment to clarify what [civil rights](#) groups, including Color Of Change, have been demanding for several years versus what Facebook has actually done and agreed to do," said Rashad Robinson, president of Color of Change. "Despite a sweeping statement from corporate leaders that Facebook must do better to protect its Black users, the company has failed to address our core demands meaningfully."

Of the 10 demands made during the monthlong boycott, Facebook has not addressed six and only

partially addressed four, according to the report card.

For example, Color of Change says Facebook did not follow its recommendations to shut down hate speech on its platforms, yet told advertisers that it leads the industry in removing hate speech and that its artificial intelligence technology is getting better and faster all the time. While Facebook conceded to another demand, hiring a civil rights executive, it does not plan to do so at the leadership level, as organizers requested, Color of Change said.

Robinson says the coalition created the report card to rebut claims Facebook made in its own missive to advertisers which compared the #StopHateForProfit recommendations and "the ongoing work at Facebook."

"There's some overlap between what the boycott organizers have asked for and what we already do, which reaffirms the fact that our end goals are the same—fight online hate," Facebook wrote to advertisers during the boycott. "This doesn't mean we won't do more to address the delta between what we currently do and what the organizers have asked for, but the side-by-side is meant to illustrate what we are doing and what we are exploring thanks to continued conversations with the civil rights community."

Asked for comment on the report card from civil rights groups, Facebook said it has invested billions in removing hate speech from its platforms and has a "clear plan of action" to continue the fight.

During the company's second-quarter earnings call, chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg said often when companies are boycotted, they don't agree with the boycotters.

"That's not true at all here. We completely agree that we don't want hate on our platforms, and we stand firmly against it. We don't benefit from hate speech. We never have. Users don't want to see it. Advertisers don't want to be associated with it. And we've been working for a really long time to get better at this, to finding it," Sandberg said. "In many ways, we lead our industry in transparency and execution. We're going to keep working really hard at this, not for financial reasons or [advertiser](#) pressure, because it's the right thing to do."

The pact between corporations and civil rights groups was forged in the aftermath of George Floyd's death. Advertisers pulled spending from Facebook in July to protest the company's record on civil rights, giving voice to years of complaints that Facebook disproportionately stifles Black users while failing to protect them from harassment.

More than 1,000 advertisers including Disney, Walmart and Verizon took part, siphoning millions in ad dollars—not enough to put a dent in Facebook's revenue, but enough to draw greater public scrutiny of toxic content on Facebook.

Last week, 20 state attorneys general issued an open letter to Facebook, demanding that it step up enforcement of its hate speech policies. The attorneys general outlined seven steps the company should take, including allowing independent audits of hate speech. Facebook responded: "We share the Attorneys General's goal of ensuring people feel safe on the internet and look forward to continuing our work with them."

That same week, nearly three dozen House Democrats including Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York sent a letter to Zuckerberg and chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg urging Facebook to address [hate speech](#) targeting women, particularly women candidates and political leaders. "Cindy Southworth, Facebook's head of women's safety, said the company would continue to work with lawmakers to "to surface new solutions."

Hate speech also came up during a congressional hearing last month on the market power of big tech companies.

"Are you so big that you don't care how you're impacted by a major boycott of 1,100 advertisers?" Rep. Pramila Jayapal, a Democrat from Washington, challenged CEO Mark Zuckerberg.

"No, Congresswoman, of course we care," said Zuckerberg. But, he continued, Facebook would not let advertisers dictate the company's policies.

Even after the boycott officially ended, some advertisers including Ben & Jerry's have continued on, as have some of the campaign's biggest supporters.

Prince Harry, who with wife Meghan Markle worked behind the scenes to support the Stop Hate for Profit movement, has continued to call on social media to stamp out hate.

"Our message was clear: The digital landscape is unwell and companies like yours have the chance to reconsider your role in funding and supporting online platforms that have contributed to, stoked, and created the conditions for a crisis of hate, a crisis of health, and a crisis of truth," he wrote in an essay for Fast Company.

The Duke of Sussex says he has been talking with Color of Change President Rashad Robinson about how to take action on racial justice since the protests began.

"This is not down to the Black community," Harry said in a virtual interview posted Monday on Instagram by Color of Change. "This is down to every single person that is on the planet right now."

©2020 USA Today  
Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

APA citation: Facebook gets bad grades on report card from civil rights groups behind advertising boycott (2020, August 13) retrieved 8 December 2021 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2020-08-facebook-bad-grades-card-civil.html>

*This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.*