

A Standard for Universal Digital Ad Transparency | Knight First Amendment Institute

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Election meddling and public health misinformation have fueled calls for greater transparency around online advertising on social media platforms. In response, many platforms have begun to make voluntary disclosures about some of the ads they run, but these efforts remain woefully insufficient. Platforms often neglect to provide data about how ads microtarget users, and only disclose data about a narrow category of political ads, failing to capture the larger ecosystem of digital advertising that is shaping our political, social, and economic environment.

Moreover, current regulatory measures have not kept up as digital advertising has proliferated, allowing misinformation and hate speech to spread rapidly through paid online channels that lack meaningful oversight, driven by algorithmic systems poorly understood by users and policymakers concerned with such threats to the democratic process. And to make matters worse, social media companies have also demonstrated hostility towards researchers who have tried to study advertising on their platforms.

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