



CCIA contribution on greater transparency in sponsored political content

The Computer & Communications Industry Association (CCIA) supports the European Democracy Action Plan and its goal to provide more transparency in political advertising and to safeguard election integrity, freedom of expression, and media pluralism.

With different regulatory regimes on political ads across the Member States, more guidance at EU level would help steer common practices preventing isolated initiatives at national level. It is also important to have a holistic view on all actors involved (online and offline).

CCIA would welcome clear rules starting with an indisputable definition of political advertising, a framework for cross-border political ads, standards for political advertisers, and input on the applicability of offline political advertising rules (on expenditures and air time). CCIA would also encourage the creation of guidance (taking into account the positive developments achieved absent regulation) on the appropriate transparency measures platforms should implement to fight disinformation and misinformation and protect citizens from manipulation, while ensuring that European businesses can continue to benefit from advertising services as they seek to scale up and prosper in the EU internal market.

On the outlined policy options, it is worth noting that the European Commission itself acknowledges that in the baseline scenario *“the evolution of the status quo will also be affected by a series of measures”*. There are indeed several on-going initiatives that will have an impact on political advertising. This includes the Digital Service Act (DSA) proposal, the work on strengthening the Code of Practice on Disinformation, the enforcement of EU data protection rules, and the implementation of the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive. Before adding another layer, and potentially creating confusion, we would urge legislators to evaluate their impact, assess potential gaps and propose proportionate responses.

Digital service providers will comply with new obligations vis-a-vis advertising transparency under the DSA proposal and also with self-regulatory regimes already in place. Several CCIA members have already implemented effective measures to provide greater transparency in sponsored political content, e.g. ads library, labelling of ads, identity checks, specific disclaimers, and ranking systems.

We think that the indicated “baseline scenario” is quite different from the traditional concept of status quo where policy/regulatory changes become needed due to the lack of alternative solutions. Online advertising, sponsored political content included, is addressed by a few on-going initiatives, as mentioned above, and continues to develop as service providers respond to evolving market demand for transparency and measurability. Indeed, the degree of transparency in digital advertising is already high compared to other advertising formats.

Nevertheless, if there will be political consensus towards a new intervention from the European Commission, we would recommend a set of clear rules that establish (i) what constitutes political advertising in the EU; (ii) who can run political ads, and when; and (iii) the extent to which cross-border political advertising is permitted. Further guidance on advertisers’ standards and responsibilities, and service providers’ transparency measures, could then be developed via self-regulatory tools and multi-party stakeholder efforts.

Any ad transparency requirements should be meaningful for users and manageable for online platforms. Whether they are made under the DSA or dedicated rules for political advertisement, safeguards should be considered to ensure that transparency obligations are reasonable, technologically neutral, flexible, proportionate, and built on existing tools developed by online platforms.

About CCIA

CCIA is an international, not-for-profit trade association representing a broad cross section of communications and technology firms. For nearly fifty years, CCIA has promoted open markets, open systems, and open networks. For more, visit www.ccianet.org.