

MAGNA

DISTRESSING NEWS IN 2021: RESPONDING AND ASSESSING RISK

A MAGNA PERSPECTIVE

8 January 2021

MAGNA PERSPECTIVE

SITUATION

On the afternoon of January 6th, 2021, armed insurrectionists temporarily seized control of the U.S. Capitol building, interfering with the U.S. Congress debate and confirmation of the results of the electoral college vote, the last step prior to inauguration in the peaceful transition of power.

Scenes of enraged civilians, many with offensive symbols, in violent confrontation with U.S. Capitol and Metropolitan DC police led many of our clients to immediately ask for media pauses and guidance on how to handle future “flashpoints” in public discourse.

The situation was further inflamed when President Donald Trump took to social channels to praise the rioters and reinforce disproved claims of election fraud. They drove widespread social activity, including posts that would run afoul of brand safety guidelines and platforms’ own terms of service.

There was also a cultural/audience dimension to this: BIPOC communities were understandably quite vocal about the ability of a mostly white group to breach U.S. Capitol police with limited intervention. The image comparisons to Black Lives Matter protests in Washington D.C. greeted with armed guards stand as proof to this.

Considering the ongoing pandemic, economic pressures, evolving conversations about race in America, and the changeover in political power, we can use the lessons of January 6th to prepare for future flashpoints.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS AND ACTION STEPS

A three-step plan to manage paid communications during future “flashpoint” moments

1 BACKSTOP BRAND SAFETY



- Reliance on **regularly updated** category-level brand safety tools (MOAT, DoubleVerify, etc.).
- Implement 12-24 Hour pauses for social media during flashpoints, per brand appetite.



2 CREATIVE/ CULTURAL SENSITIVITY GUT CHECK



- Ask if creative or message will appear inappropriate in this moment? If so, swap creative or suspend.
- Ask how any key audience constituency(ies) are affected by this news. Does it warrant a pause/shift in paid media channels?



3 PREPARE FOR FUTURE FLASHPOINTS



- Stand up client response teams and point people for upcoming potential flashpoints (see "Preparing").
- Make a practice of proactive monitoring for unanticipated "Black Swan" events that may affect your brand (see "Preparing").



MAGNA PERSPECTIVE

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND ACTION STEPS

Consider adopting a risk framework by brand, as necessary, to guide easy decision making in the future



Highest Risk

CONSIDER PAUSES DURING FUTURE FLASHPOINTS

Channels with the highest likelihood of inflammatory content and more difficult moderation

YouTube
Twitter
Facebook
Instagram
Reddit



Medium Risk

PRIMARILY CONSIDER CREATIVE/CULTURE BUT ALSO BRAND RISK TOLERANCE

Channels with user generated content, but less political inflammatory content

Snapchat
TikTok
Digital Open Exchange/Programmatic*



Lowest Risk

CONTINUE ABSENT CREATIVE/CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Television
Digital Direct*
Audio/Radio

*provided you are using category-level blocks and inclusions

IMMEDIATE MEDIA IMPACT

Social Media:

Many clients promptly instituted pauses on social media activity. In our view, this was a prudent decision for risk-averse brands as the situation was highly dynamic. It is good to give a period of 12-24 hours as platforms remove bad actors and revise AI and human moderation to stamp out reposts.

In the intervening hours, social platforms took direct action to suspend President Trump's platform and algorithmically or otherwise suppress any content inciting violence. See appendix for latest status.

Digital (other than social):

News websites likely experienced significant traffic boosts in the short-term. The UM Brand Safety team advised clients *against* adding keyword exclusion lists, because it likely results in significant false positive blockings, limiting advertiser scale and appearances adjacent to legitimate news content. Instead, it is good practice to maintain ongoing block/inclusion lists to avoid funding misinformation and hateful content.

Television:

Tune-in to news likely increased, as we saw with 2020's flashpoint events. However, both cable and broadcast networks went all-live and discontinued ad breaks during the immediate moment of crisis, negating the need for any advertiser decision.

Other than for creative considerations, we would advise clients not to shift any planned television in news. There is a public, consumer, and democratic interest in the news, and networks showed good judgment with their decisions on Wednesday.

YouTube:

YouTube was linked with the main negative news coverage for brands, where display ads appeared adjacent to content of individuals advocating for violence, celebrating the riot, etc.

YouTube has suspended some accounts of individuals live streaming or inciting violence and has removed some of President Trump's videos. However, it has maintained his account.

PREPARING FOR FUTURE FLASHPOINTS

The ongoing pressures of the pandemic and the U.S. political situation leave the early part of 2021 open to many potential flashpoints. **Now is a good time to shore up client response teams and point people to activate your brand safety backstops and creative/culture checks**, as well as decide if you need your own risk classification by channel/publisher for a client.

First, continue the long-term maintenance of inclusion and block/lists for any real-time bidding media (including social). This is your best line of defense in a crisis and can avoid short-term decision making that hurts reach unnecessarily.

Potential Domestic Flashpoints: Focusing on politicized moments or those with a racial/cultural dimension

- **The next week:** Increasing calls for invoking the 25th Amendment or impeachment
- **The next week:** Controversial pardons likely
- **January 15:** Georgia Counties must certify their results in the Senators election.
- **January 18:** MLK Day
- **January 20:** Inauguration Day
- **January 22:** Georgia must certify the election results of Senators Warnock and Ossoff. It's quite possible they won't be sworn in until this date.
- **Week of January 25:** Likely hearings on cabinet nominations, particularly any controversial ones held for the new Senators to be seated
- **January 31:** Federal student loan forbearance expires unless renewed
- **February 1:** Start of Black History Month
- **February 14:** 3-year anniversary of Parkland Florida shooting

PREPARING FOR FUTURE FLASHPOINTS

Potential Global Flashpoints facing new administration: *Focusing on global actors disruptive to U.S.*

- Iran: New reveals of enrichment of Uranium. **February 10th** is the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution
- Russia: Any response and sanctions for the recently uncovered hack of up to 250 federal agencies
- Middle East broadly: **10th** anniversary of the Arab Spring this year and the **30th** anniversary of the Gulf War on **February 28th**
- North Korea: Potential belligerence in the face of a new, harder line. **February 16th** is the Birth Date anniversary of Kim Jong Un's father Kim Jong Il
- China: A WHO team was dispatched, and currently denied entry by China, to investigate the origins of COVID-19. Chinese New Year Holidays February **11-17**

Suggestions for monitoring to pulse check for upcoming flashpoints:

Reassure clients about your proactive protection with active monitoring for social unrest, with an eye to key issues of relevance or enhanced scrutiny for their brand.

- Social Media monitoring and sentiment tools
- YouTube **trending**
- Reddit's popular **subreddits**

APPENDIX

PLATFORM RESPONSES TO EVENTS OF JAN. 6TH (CURRENT AS OF JAN. 8TH AM)

Facebook and Instagram:

- Mark Zuckerberg has stated that President Trump will be banned from the platform (Facebook and Instagram) indefinitely and at least for the 2 weeks until the transition is complete. [View source](#)

Twitter:

- Twitter suspended President Trump for 12 hours on the evening of January 6th and removed tweets in violation of its civic integrity policy. Trump's account is now active again. [View source](#)

YouTube:

- YouTube required the [removal of one of President Trump's videos](#). The account is not suspended.
- YouTube is also suspending some accounts of individuals live streaming or inciting violence. [View video removal news coverage](#)
- YouTube has since clarified their stance on 1/7, noting that accounts which post videos with false claims about the election will be given a strike, and that a strike temporarily suspends them from posting or live streaming. Three strikes earns a 90-day suspension. [View source](#)

Snapchat:

- Account suspended (ongoing, until decision is reviewed). [View source](#)
- Please note, Snapchat is notable as it's the only platform that also considers off-platform behavior when making decisions.

Shopify and PayPal:

- Shopify removed stores associated with Donald Trump and his campaign on Thursday, citing violations of policies prohibiting users from promoting or supporting organizations that foment violence.
- Similarly, PayPal shut down an account raising funds for Trump supporters to travel to Washington D.C., called Joy in Liberty, for violating its rules. [View source](#)

TikTok has had a limited role in this situation, without a Donald Trump account, and has not issued any new directives.