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Why Did I Lose My Seat in the United States Congressional Elections?
You Didn't Advertise Online Enough!

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Abstract:

In this paper, we examine campaign spending on Facebook during the 2020 U.S. congressional elections. We draw conclusions based on data from the Federal Election Commission and the Facebook Ad Library. This is one of the first articles on this topic. We point out and show how this data differs and how other researchers should treat it. Specifically, we focus on U.S. Democratic congresspeople who lost elections. Indeed, during the Democratic Party debate, voices were raised that its progressive wing was to blame for the loss of seats; in contrast, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a rising star of the wing, argued that the lack of Facebook advertising was a factor in why seats were lost. The article concludes that the really well-known Democratic figures who lost the elections spent very little on Facebook ads compared to Ocasio-Cortez. We also compare Republican opponents with Democrats. In addition, we highlight how the Ocasio-Cortez campaign and the others differed with respect to the timing of campaign spending and the targeting of Facebook ads to specific states. Further, we compare data regarding campaigns available through the Federal Election Commission and Facebook and underscore the importance of the transparency of the Facebook Ad Library.

Key words: *campaign finance; Democratic Party; election campaigns; social media; transparency; U.S. election*

Introduction

The 2020 U.S. presidential election represented a turning point in American history. As the election occurred during a global pandemic, measures aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19 impacted elections, voters, and candidates. The most fundamental measure was to reduce personal contact between people, which in practice meant reducing attendance of election rallies, or even their cancelling, as well as restricting the kind of canvassing in which voters are directly visited in their homes by politicians. Candidates were thus forced to seek other forms of communication with voters, to place greater emphasis on the role of

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the Internet, and to campaign through Facebook, the most widely used social media in the United States. The issue of online advertising in election campaigns became the subject of a verbal skirmish between representatives of the Democrats' progressive wing and the old congressional structures, all of whom have been attempting to explain why Democrats lost several seats in the Senate and the House of Representatives. In total, 12 House Democrats who sought re-election lost their races (Ballotpedia 2020). Among the defeated were also high-profile Democrats, such as Donna Shalala, a former Health and Human Rights Services secretary in the Clinton administration (Chandler 2020; Huetteman 2020).

Influential Democratic politician and House Majority Whip James Clyburn blamed the progressive movement for the loss of seats, particularly the Defund the Police initiative supported by many candidates. This is a progressive policy that seeks to redistribute money flowing into police departments towards social services. In general, the argument is that the United States spends significantly on security but comparatively little on social welfare (Brewster 2020). "I believe that's why Joe Cunningham lost his seat," Clyburn commented regarding the defeat of the congressman who was seeking re-election (McEvoy 2020).

The rising star of the progressive wing of the Democrats, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez ("AOC"), struck back. A well-known influencer on social media, she criticized unsuccessful Democrats in a recent interview. According to her, they underestimated the importance of social media, invested little in online advertising, and this was reflected in the Democrats losing so many seats in the House of Representatives. AOC told The New York Times, 'If you're not spending $200,000 on Facebook with fund-raising, persuasion, volunteer recruitment, get-out-the-vote the week before the election, you are not firing on all cylinders. And not a single one of these campaigns were firing on all cylinders,' (Canales 2020; Herndon 2020).

Our primary intention is to discover how many unsuccessful Democratic congresspeople who sought re-election invested in online advertising in both absolute numbers and in relation to the other costs of the campaign, and compared to the online spending of the AOC and Republican campaigns.

Based on the set objective, the following research question is formulated: What was the Facebook spending of Democratic congresspersons who were unsuccessful in the congressional elections compared to AOC and Republicans?

In pursuing the objective, we will also monitor how the campaigns reported Facebook spending to the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC), an independent regulatory agency that enforces federal campaign finance law. In practice, it records, publishes and regulates funds raised and spent to influence U.S. elections (Federal Election Commission 2020). The objectives will be met using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

Due to Facebook's new transparency policy, it is possible to achieve such goals. Facebook has decided to publish the spending of candidate's profiles on its site, rendering it possible to track the exact amounts spent over time via the Facebook Ad Library (Facebook Inc. 2020). While this represents a significant step forward in the control and transparency of election campaign funding, it also highlights the role of social media in elections, a particularly important issue given the events of 2018 in which Cambridge Analytica, linked to Donald Trump's adviser and campaign, built voter profiles by misusing the data of millions of Facebook users (Confessore 2018).

Theory and literature review

The theoretical basis of the article is based on the academic literature on congressional finance, the role of Facebook in American campaigns, and especially social media advertising.

Finance in U.S. congressional elections

A wealth of research addresses the issue of campaign finance in the context of U.S. congressional elections and its implications, including detailed books (Garrett 2011; Gronke 2010; Jacobson and Carson 2020; Kolodny 2011) and professional articles (Dawson and Zinser 1976; Jacobson 1985; Squire 1995). This research has addressed questions such as whether campaign money helps incumbents or challengers more (Abramowitz 1991; Jacobson 1978, 2015), how much less well-known candidates have to invest relative to more well-known candidates (Kim and Leveck 2013), whether male or female candidates are more effective in fundraising depending on whether they Democrats or Republicans (Kitchens and Swers 2016; Thomsen and Swers 2017), and whether campaign money leads to party unity in congressional voting (Cantor and Herrnson 1997).

The literature has further examined the campaign finance system and related issues of regulation and transparency (Abrams and Settle 2004; Bowler and Donovan 2016; Fontana 2017; Magleby 2001; La Raja 2014; Wertheimer 1986). The issue of pork barrel spending in U.S. congressional elections is no exception, which some research suggests helps Democrats rather than Republicans (Alvarez and Saving 1997). There are also papers that have investigated how much a party needs to spend on a campaign to win a majority in the House of Representatives (Cox and Magar 1999) and how companies can profitably invest in congressional election campaigns and build political networks (Akey 2015). There are also papers that address interest groups and their influence on members of congress through political action committees – PACs (Bombardini and Trebbi 2011) – and how congresspersons' attitudes towards Donald Trump have affected their campaign financing (Fu and Howell 2020). In any case, extant research suggests that money has a significant influence in U.S. congressional campaigns (Ferguson, Jorgensen, and Chen 2019).

Facebook in U.S. elections

When it comes to the use of Facebook for electoral campaigns, the United States is not only one of the pioneers, but also one of the countries with the greatest interest from the academic community. Interest in how politicians use the social media network began as early as the 2008 primary and subsequent presidential elections (Carlisle and Patton 2013; Dalsgaard 2008; Fernandes et al. 2010; Johnson and Perlmutter 2010; Robertson, Vatrapu, and Medina 2010; Vitak et al. 2011; Woolley, Limperos, and Oliver 2010). It was Barack Obama's campaign that introduced Facebook as an effective tool for communicating with voters. It is therefore not surprising that the Facebook accounts of Obama and his Republican challenger were analyzed in the election held four years later (Borah 2016; Pennington et al. 2015). Although Donald Trump was known for his active use of Twitter, the role of Facebook has been examined in the context of the heated 2016 presidential election in which he defeated Hillary Clinton (Beam, Hutchens, and Hmielowski 2018; Bossetta 2018; Rossini, Stromer-Galley, and Zhang 2020; Silva et al. 2018). Research on the use of Facebook

in election campaigns is not limited to presidential elections, but also includes congressional and gubernatorial elections (MacWilliams 2015; Mascaro, Novak, and Goggins 2012; Williams and Gulati 2013), legislators in each state (Bekafigo et al. 2013), and local elected representatives (Flores 2017; Sances 2018).

Online advertising on Facebook

Social media such as Facebook allow not only the creation of a political profile, but also foster the development of a trend that is becoming increasingly pronounced every year: the rising investment in online advertising (Dommett 2019). Although online ads have been on the rise in recent years, there are very few studies at the level of Facebook that look at what political parties and movements are investing in them, how much money they are investing compared to their competitors, and what impact this may have not only on elections but also on society. Such research has been particularly concentrated in the United Kingdom, where spending on Facebook ads could exceed even the statutory limits on campaigning within constituencies, undermining the fairness and transparency of the electoral process. Issues ranging from the regulation and control of online ad spending to the importance of online ads for democracy have thus been the subject of scholarly interest (Dommett and Bakir 2020; Dommett and Power 2019; Moore 2016).

Above all, the literature review shows that campaign spending is crucial for electoral success. Furthermore, Facebook is a prominent social media that is widely used by politicians to reach voters in all types of American elections. There are also several research gaps from the literature review that this article will attempt to fill. While there is a body of research from the U.S. environment that focuses on campaign spending in relation to election outcomes, it does not focus exclusively on online ad spending. Research on Facebook and elections in the United States is similar in terms of the prevailing trend. Previous research has focused on the content of individual politicians' Facebook posts and their interactions with voters, but not on ad spending on this medium. For these reasons, the article fills a research gap and focuses exclusively on Facebook ad spending in U.S. congressional elections.

However, the question remains: how important is spending on social media advertisements on platforms such as Facebook in congressional campaigns?

Therefore, based on the stated objectives and literature review, the following hypothesis is formulated: *Democratic congresspersons who spent less on Facebook advertising than AOC and Republicans were more likely to not win the seat.*

Analysis

Data have been collected from several sources. The FEC has provided data on campaign finances, and we included the latest data from the post-general election report that House committees were required to submit by December 3, 2020. Therefore, we covered a period from the beginning of the 2020 campaign until November 23, 2020. Facebook provided data on election spending on its site. In addition, we utilized data from the Center for Responsive Politics concerning the top recipients of each campaign (Center for Responsive Politics 2020). More specifically, we recorded data provided monthly by the spending tracker in Facebook Ad Library to obtain data on an individual campaign's Facebook spending over

each 30-day period. Through these means, we collected data from the period of August 1, 2019 to November 3, 2020.

Table 1 indicates that AOC's arguments are relevant. Democrats who lost their seats invested only a minimal percentage of their total campaign costs in online advertising. After AOC, Max Rose (New York) invested the most, but it was still only 5% of his total cost ratio. On the other hand, Collin Peterson's (Minnesota) online advertising costs on Facebook accounted for only 0.4% of his total campaign spending. But these are two extreme cases. Democratic congresspeople who lost their seats, such as Debbie Mucarsel-Powell from Florida, on average spent approximately 3% of the total cost of their campaigns on Facebook advertising. These values are marginal compared to how much AOC invested in Facebook advertising. In her case, these costs accounted for more than 35% of the total campaign costs, which amount to more than $5 million since August 2019. In contrast, most of the unsuccessful congresspersons spent much less money, for example Joe Cunningham invested less than $400,000 in Facebook advertising, and Collin Peterson invested less than $12,000.

In examining how many congresspeople spent on Facebook advertising in election campaigns, it is necessary to distinguish between payments directly to Facebook and advertising agencies that mediate and manage advertising on social media. AOC does not primarily use these third-party services. Instead, her campaign pays Facebook directly for online advertising. Therefore, the top recipient of her campaign was Facebook. By contrast, all 12 unsuccessful congresspersons had advertising and media agencies as the top recipients of funding. Four used GMMB, two used BlueWest Media and Sage Media Planning & Placement, and some paid for advertising companies such as Screen Strategies Media, Left Hook Communications, Aidem LLC or Main Street Communications.

Table 1: Democratic congresspeople and their spending on Facebook

| Name	Facebook spending since Aug 2019	Facebook spending since Aug 2019 as percentage of total spend	Top Recipient	Reported Facebook as funding recipient in FEC campaign finance data
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez	5,245,990	31.4%[a]	Facebook Inc	Yes
Max Rose	520,234	5.5%	GMMB	No
Joe Cunningham	394,261	5.5%	GMMB	No
Ben McAdams	242,209	4.4%	BlueWest Media	No
Harley Rouda	248,721	3.9%	GMMB	No
Abby Finkenauer	221,677	3.8%	Bluewest Media	No
Debbie Mucarsel-Powell	242,912	3.5%	Screen Strategies Media	No
Gil Cisneros	113,171	2.6%	Left Hook Communications	No
Xochitl Torres Small	181,229	2.1%	Sage Media Planning & Placement	No
Kendra Horn	116,376	2.0%	Sage Media Planning & Placement	No
TJ Cox	99,173	1.7%	GMMB	No
Donna Shalala	47,311	1.3%	Aidem LLC	No

Name	Facebook spending since Aug 2019	Facebook spending since Aug 2019 as percentage of total spend	Top Recipient	Reported Facebook as funding recipient in FEC campaign finance data
Collin Peterson	11,885	0.4%	Main Street Communications	Yes

Notes: the costs from the data on Facebook from August 2019 are estimated as a percentage of the total costs of the campaign from January 1, 2019 to November 23, 2020. The source of data concerning the top recipient is the Center for Responsive Politics. However, the share of Facebook spending since January 2019 on total spending would be approximately 35%. Only AOC was spending on Facebook early in the campaign and reported data directly to the FEC. Therefore, it is possible to calculate the estimated share since January 2019. Nevertheless, for the rest of the politicians, the share would not generally change significantly because they started advertising a few weeks before the general election.

Source: *Authors.*

Because they paid Facebook directly, only the AOC and Collin Peterson campaigns acknowledged the cost of advertising with it. The remaining congresspeople in the table have not done so as such costs are not listed in the recipients or description fields. Because of Facebook's transparency policy, it is therefore possible to discover who spends online and how much. It would not be possible to find out from FEC data alone.

Figure 1: Online advertising on Facebook over time
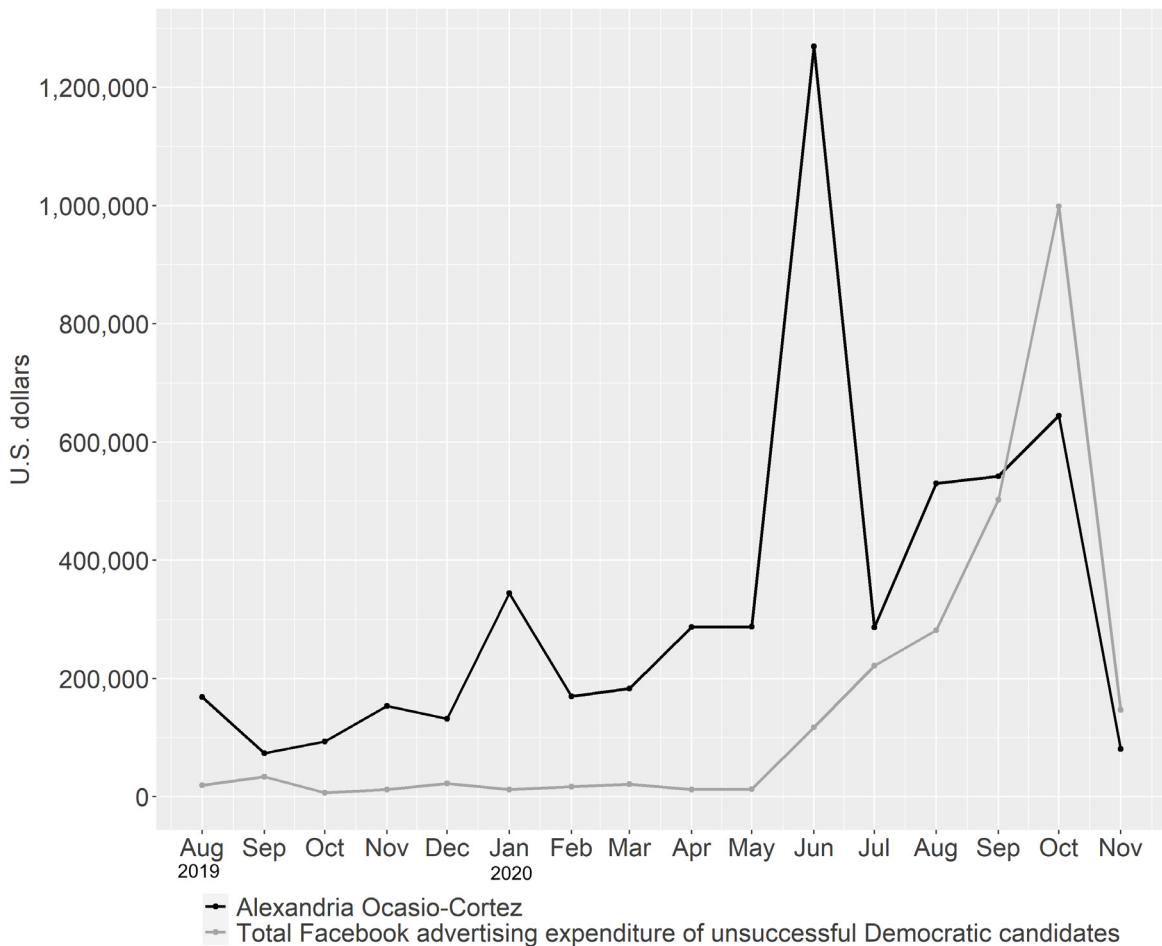
Source: *Authors.*

Figure 1 illustrates the cost of online advertising on Facebook over time. A clear trend is visible. While defeated congresspeople seeking re-election invested the largest percentage of the cost of online advertising throughout the most crucial part of the 2020 election campaign, in both September and October, AOC invested in Facebook advertising primarily in June. It should be noted that AOC's New York 14th congressional district is a 'safe' district. Democrats achieve consistently high results there and are unlikely to lose this seat. Democrats in such a district tend to expect serious challengers mainly from their own ranks; indeed, AOC herself defeated the Democratic incumbent, Joseph Crowley, in a 2018 primary election. Figure 1 therefore reveals that AOC's tactics focused on online advertising on Facebook, particularly during the primary election, while spending significantly less during the general election. By contrast, failed incumbent Democratic congresspersons concentrated most Facebook spending against Republican opponents in the general election.

Because many voters were able to take advantage of early voting, the question remains whether significant investments in online advertising were not too late in October and perhaps contributed to the failure of Democratic congresspeople. According to the United States Elections Project, as of October 4, 3.3 million people had already voted (U.S. Elections Project 2020). As of October 25, almost 60 million voters had already cast their ballots. Therefore, campaigns that began spending money at the end of October could affect fewer votes than those that started earlier.

What About Republicans?

Table 2: Comparison of Democrats and Republicans

Name	Party	Result	Facebook spending since Aug 2019 US dollars	Facebook spending since Aug 2019 as percentage of total spend
California District 21 Median age: 32.0 Population over 25: bachelor's degree or higher: 17.9%				
David Valadao	Rep	50.4%	52,524	1.3%
TJ Cox	Dem	49.6%	**99,173**	**1.7%**
California District 39 Median age: 32.9 Population over 25: bachelor's degree or higher: 19.1%				
Young Kim	Rep	50.6%	**755,144**	**12.9%**
Gil Cisneros	Dem	49.4%	113,171	2.6%
California District 48 Median age: 38.7 Population over 25: bachelor's degree or higher: 34.2%				
Michelle Steel	Rep	51.1%	**337,655**	**5.5%**
Harley Rouda	Dem	48.9%	248,721	3.9%
Florida District 26 Median age: 42.6 Population over 25: bachelor's degree or higher: 30.2%				
Carlos Gimenez	Rep	51.7%	45,091	2.1%
Debbie Mucarsel-Powell	Dem	48.3%	**242,912**	**3.5%**

| Name	Party	Result	Facebook spending since Aug 2019 US dollars	Facebook spending since Aug 2019 as percentage of total spend
Florida District 27 Median age: 42.2 Population over 25: bachelor's degree or higher: 44.2%				
Maria Elvira Salazar	Rep	51.4%	**58,671**	**1.6%**
Donna Shalala	Dem	48.6%	47,311	1.3%
Iowa District 01 Median age: 39.0 Population over 25: bachelor's degree or higher: 33.6%				
Ashley Hinson	Rep	51.2%	**324,456**	**6.5%**
Abby Finkenauer	Dem	48.6%	221,677	3.8%
Minnesota District 7 Median age: 41.9 Population over 25: bachelor's degree or higher: 24.9%				
Michelle Fischbach	Rep	53.4%	69,857	2.8%
Collin Peterson	Dem	39.8%	11,885	0.4%
New Mexico District 2 Median age: 36.9 Population over 25: bachelor's degree or higher: 23.3%				
Yvette Herrell	Rep	53.7%	39,060	1.3%
Xochitl Torres Small	Dem	46.3%	**181,229**	2.1%
New York District 11 Median age: 41.0 Population over 25: bachelor's degree or higher: 35.3%				
Nicole Malliotakis	Rep	53.1%	180,384	5.2%
Max Rose	Dem	46.8%	**520,234**	**5.5%**
New York District 14 Median age: 37.1 Population over 25: bachelor's degree or higher: 27.1%				
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez	Dem	71.6%	**5,245,990**	**31.4%**
John Cummings	Rep	27.4%	671,768	6.1%
Oklahoma District 5 Median age: 37.6 Population over 25: bachelor's degree or higher: 38.4%				
Stephanie Bice	Rep	52.1%	**221,680**	**6.3%**
Kendra Horn	Dem	47.9%	116,376	2.0%
South Carolina District 1 Median age: 41.3 Population over 25: bachelor's degree or higher: 43.3%				
Nancy Mace	Rep	50.6%	284,640	4.9%
Joe Cunningham	Dem	49.3%	**394,261**	**5.5%**
Utah District 4 Median age: 31.5 Population over 25: bachelor's degree or higher: 34.7%				
Burgess Owens	Rep	47.7%	69,457	1.4%
Ben McAdams	Dem	46.7%	**242,209**	**4.4%**

Source: *Authors.*

Note: Data was obtained from the My Congressional District map (U.S. Census Bureau 2023).

Table 2 reveals that Democrats who lost their seats indeed invested only an insubstantial percentage of the total campaign expenditure into online advertising on Facebook. Nevertheless, it is necessary to examine the other side of the aisle and learn how much Republican challengers invested in online advertising compared to Democrats. Table 2 indicates that it is not true that Republicans invest significantly more as a share of the total cost of the campaign. While in several cases, such as in California District 39, the Republican challenger did spend more, Democrats invested more elsewhere. For example, in Utah District 4, Ben McAdams's campaign invested 3% more in online advertising relative to total costs compared to the Republican candidate, Burgess Owens. When comparing Democrats to Republicans, it is clear that the chances of both camps were approximately equal. The question, of course, remains as to whether AOC was correct in thinking that, if the Democrats had invested significantly more, they would have kept their seats in the House of Representatives. As for the New York congresswoman AOC, the table demonstrates that she completely dominated her Republican challenger, John Cummings, in Facebook advertising spending, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the total campaign cost.

When compared to other districts, New York District 14, represented by AOC, is not notably younger in demographic terms. Nonetheless, its median age of 37.1 denotes a considerable number of younger constituents, commonly associated with vibrant social media participation. Even so, some other districts on the list have a lower median age, implying even more extensive social media use. In terms of education, the percentage of individuals over 25 with a bachelor's degree or higher in District 14 is 27.1%, which is lower than in some other districts. This may indicate a greater utilization of social media in other districts.

Figure 2: Electoral result and spending on Facebook
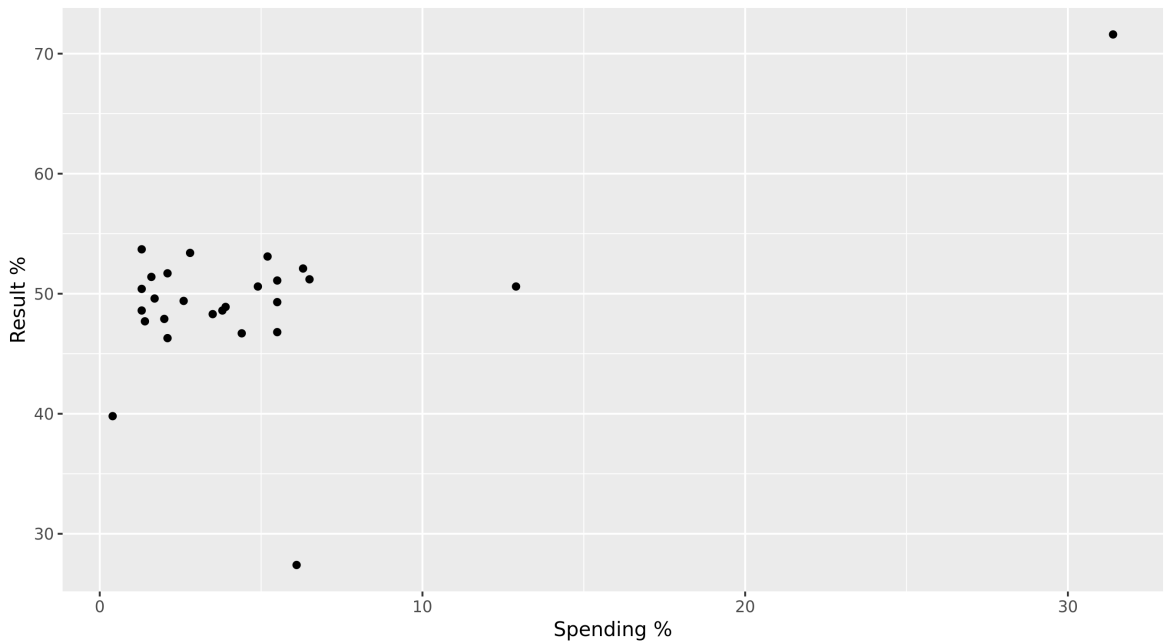
Figure 2 illustrates the correlation between Facebook advertising spending and the percentage of votes received in congressional elections for both Democratic and Republican candidates. In order not to stay only with descriptive statistics, we also performed statistical

analysis to verify our arguments. We found a strong correlation between Facebook spending and the percentage of votes received in the election in this sample (Person's correlation coefficient = 0.59, p = 0.001). However, it is necessary to mention a certain research limit as this is only a limited sample, but these results suggest further research along these lines should be done. Researchers could look at the relationship between spending on Facebook and electoral outcome in a larger sample or in a different country. It should also be mentioned that in the case of building regression models, it would be necessary to include many more variables that could influence the outcome of the election than just online advertising spending.

However, the hypothesis: "Democratic congresspersons who spent less on Facebook advertising than AOC and Republicans were more likely to not win the seat," must be rejected, as there was no clear trend from the comparison of Democrats to Republicans.

Where Was Money Spent?

Table 3: Difference between Facebook campaign accounts

Name	@ Facebook	Likes	% Facebook advertising money spent in home states
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez	OcasioCortez	1,592,391	24.5%
Max Rose	MaxRoseForCongress	12,706	92.5%
Joe Cunningham	JoeCunninghamSC	23,738	92.8%
Harley Rouda	HarleyforCongress	14,533	99.7%
Kendra Horn	KendraHornForCongress	11,808	97.7%
Gil Cisneros	GilCisnerosCA	11,460	85.4%
Ben McAdams	benmcadamsutah	10,581	98.5%
Abby Finkenauer	Abby4Iowa	9,867	96.1%
Debbie Mucarsel-Powell	debbieforfl	7,224	55.2%
Xochitl Torres Small	XochitlforCongress	6,684	89.0%
Collin Peterson	Petersonforcongress	4,418	99.3%
Donna Shalala	donnashalalaforcongress	3,084	90.1%
TJ Cox	tjcoxforcongress	3,054	80.9%

Notes: Likes are reported on the day of the election. The percentage of money spent in home states is calculated as money spent on Facebook in states where candidates ran for re-election/money spent in total on Facebook. The calculation was based on Facebook data from the last ten weeks before the election.
Source*: Authors.*

Table 3 reveals the unique position AOC has on the internet, entirely eclipsing the other Democrats analyzed in terms of her support on Facebook. More than 1.5 million Facebook users have liked her Facebook page. The second most popular congressman was Joe Cunningham, who had only 23,738 Facebook supporters. The amount spent on home states is also another substantial divergence between AOC and other congresspeople. Facebook allows advertisers to target audiences and select users residing in locations that are effective for advertisers. For most politicians running, it makes sense to target their constituencies. Simply put, it is not effective for politicians to aim for Facebook users in California when they run in New York as Californians cannot vote for them. However, in her Facebook

campaigns, AOC engages in exactly this manner of campaigning. Table 3 demonstrates that in the weeks just prior to the election, she spent only 24.5% of her Facebook advertising on New York. Most other politicians spent their financial resources overwhelmingly on their home states, often reaching almost 100% of their total spends. Indeed, this is the case to the extent that we may suspect it a considerable campaign error for a politician to not spend all available advertising resources on the state in which they run. AOC is arguably the only politician interested in advertising at the federal level. This could be due to several strategies. By being a visible politician with strong fundraising abilities, AOC can support other candidates in other districts and states who are less visible and do not have as many campaign resources as she does. She does have links to other politicians. For example, she is a part of 'the Squad', a group that consists of three other progressive congresswomen. So, of course, the question is whether and to what extent this was intended and coordinated not only with individual congresspeople seeking reelection, but also with the Democratic National Committee (DNC). Furthermore, by being a young representative of the progressive wing of the Democrats, and to strengthen her position, AOC tries to be visible in places other than New York. Finally, this strategy of investing in online advertising and gaining visibility in other states may signal her ambition to run at the federal level in the future and seek the office of vice president or president.

Conclusion

We aimed to verify AOC's argument that Democrats lost several seats in the House of Representatives in the 2020 elections because they invested little in online advertising on Facebook. Discovering how much Democrats who sought to be re-elected spent on online advertising was made possible by Facebook's relatively new transparency policy. Several analytically valuable observations emerged from the data. Democrats who lost their seats invested only a negligible percentage of the total campaign cost in online advertising. Absolute numbers in dollars were not significant either. In this regard, the criticism of the progressive congresswoman from New York is relevant.

Nor can it be said that their Republican candidates invested more in online advertising and thus won, as the comparison revealed that Republicans invested a similar percentage in online advertising as Democrats did in terms of total campaign costs. A comparison with AOC of the failed campaigns of Democrats seeking re-election demonstrated that the rising star of the American left is highly popular on Facebook in terms of the number of followers. She overshadowed the failed Democrats in both the percentage of investment in online advertising relative to total campaign spending, as well as in absolute numbers. However, AOC had two different strategies. As an incumbent in a safe district, she invested most in online advertising in the primary, while unsuccessful Democratic congresspeople concentrated investment in Facebook advertising on the general election. Moreover, AOC leveraged her familiarity and secured the New York district while expanding online advertising to other states, building a name at the federal level. This may signal her ambition to maintain her position as a prominent face of the progressive Democrats or to run for elected offices beyond the borders of New York in the future.

In addition, this article revealed that it would not be possible to examine how much is spent during election campaigns on Facebook without Facebook's relatively new transparency policy. Even though the FEC records finances during campaigns, political candidates

often pay for advertising agencies to manage advertisements. Therefore, office-seekers do not report exact data on Facebook spending to the FEC and only report their spending on advertising agencies. It would therefore be difficult to obtain data on Facebook advertising without transparency from Facebook. These Facebook efforts must be assessed positively.

Research limitations and possible directions for further research

There is room for further research in several directions. First of all, it is suggested to conduct a correlation analysis and to look for a relationship between online advertising spending and electoral results in a larger sample of cases. It would also be useful to proceed using more advanced methods such as regression analyses and construct regression models with a range of variables that may affect voter turnout and to observe the effect of the independent variable of online advertising expenditure on the dependent variable. The ambition of this article was to look for associations between online campaign spending and electoral success, providing a basis for much more robust research that would examine the causes behind correlations and include other variables based on congressional district characteristics. Indeed, the characteristics of a given district should determine campaign strategy and tactics. What matters is whether it is a safe district for the candidate or not. Socioeconomic variables such as the age composition, socio-economic affiliation, and education of the electorate in the district in question, and whether it is a rural district or an urban conurbation are also key to examining the reasons for a candidate's success in the election.

Further research may not be limited to congressional elections, but it would be interesting to look at local and gubernatorial elections in addition to presidential elections and look for potential trends in the context of Facebook online ad spending and election outcomes. Last but not least, further research should work with Facebook Ad Library, as our paper also revealed its practical implications, namely that it is not possible to distinguish between the admitted spending on Facebook advertising and the total campaign spending if candidates engage advertising agencies in this regard. We have revealed that most candidates use advertising agencies. Working with Facebook Ad Library is so important and beneficial, particularly because it can act as a check against the campaigns of individual candidates and parties as to their actual spending on Facebook.

Finally, social media other than Facebook should also be given space. Although Facebook is the dominant social network used in election campaigns, especially in terms of advertising, TikTok, which is growing in importance, can also have a significant impact on young voters (Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik 2023).

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