Is 2020 the "OK Boomer" Democratic Primary, like "Soccer Moms" was to the 1996 Election?

The battle for the Democratic Primary (and arguably the soul of the Democratic party) seems to be lining up along generational lines based on the latest @quinnipiacpoll and Booster's analysis of Q4 Facebook ad spending. It appears that [1]Boomers may tip the scale for Biden whereas Millennials and Gen Z could decide whether Sanders or Warren (and arguably Yang and Bloomberg) emerges as the Democratic candidate as 37% of the electorate are Millennials and Gen Z according to Axios.

The meme "OK Boomer" broke out in 2019 by Gen Z to mock baby boomers and those who are seen as "old-fashioned." The implication is that Boomers are "out of touch" with today's reality. The "old" ways of seeing the world no longer apply.

> "**It's important to understand that what really lies behind the meme is increasing economic, environmental, and social anxiety, and the feeling that baby boomers are leaving younger generations to clean up their mess**." **-- Aja Romano, Vox**

Based on recent polling data and candidate Facebook ad spending along generational lines in Q4, the numbers suggest there is something to the meme "OK Boomer" politically. There is a correlation between the younger generations of Millennials and Gen Z who coined the term "OK Boomer" and their support of change agent candidates in Sanders and Warren.

Is there a generational tug-of war happening in the Democratic Party?

Picture and article via NBC News

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[1] **In 2020, Boomers are 55+; Gen X are 44-54; Millennials are 26-43; and Gen Z voters are 18-25.**

Here are what the numbers tell us:

Polling: The latest @quinnipiacpoll (below) released on January 28 shows 18-34 year olds overwhelmingly supporting progressive and change agent candidates in Sanders at 53% and Warren at 23%, comprising 76% of the vote for this age demographic, compared to Biden at 3%. (Biden however does better with older Millennials and younger Gen Xers leading the 35-49 age segment at 25% of the vote). It shows a stark contrast of support based on age as Biden wins going away among 50+ year olds taking in 72% of the Boomer voters compared to Sanders 18% and Warren at 9% among Boomers. In short, it appears Gen X and older (Boomers) favor Biden, with Millennials and Gen Y supporting more progressive candidates.

| | PARTYID..... | | AGE IN YRS.............. | | | | INCOME............. | | |
	Dem	DemLn	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+	<50k	50-100	100k+
Biden	28%	17%	3%	25%	36%	36%	30%	24%	24%
Sanders	20	24	53	16	11	7	28	22	14
Warren	17	9	23	19	12	9	12	20	17
Klobuchar	6	8	–	5	10	10	4	7	8
Gabbard	1	3	1	4	1	–	–	2	2
Delaney	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–
Buttigieg	5	9	4	7	5	7	3	8	9
Yang	3	3	4	5	2	–	4	2	4
Bennet	–	–	–	–	1	1	–	–	1
Steyer	1	5	1	3	3	1	2	2	1
Patrick	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Bloomberg	7	9	2	8	4	14	5	4	13
SMONE ELSE(VOL)	–	1	1	–	–	–	–	1	–
WLDN'T VOTE(VOL)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
DK/NA	11	11	7	7	14	15	13	9	8

Q4 Facebook Ad Spending: Booster's Q4 Facebook ad spending analysis which shows ad spend against age (below) suggests most campaigns are leaning into their bases of support by targeting the age demographics they are polling well with as it shows Biden spending 69% of his budget on 55+ (i.e., Boomers), and only 15% on 18-44 year olds (i.e., Millennials and Gen Y). Whereas Sanders spends 18% on Boomers, and 66% on Millennials and Gen Z, and Warren spends 25% on Boomers, and 60% on Millennials and Gen Z. Yang and Bloomberg are also aggressively targeting Millennials and Gen Z as Yang is spending 67% of his budget against this audience and Bloomberg is spending 72%.

Ad Targeting by Age Range

Candidate	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Amy Klobuchar	3.15%	9.86%	8.48%	11.47%	24.68%	42.37%
Andrew Yang	20.84%	30.35%	16.76%	11.54%	10.79%	9.70%
Bernie Sanders	12.77%	32.41%	21.20%	12.26%	10.87%	10.50%
Cory Booker	4.39%	12.61%	15.80%	17.28%	22.09%	27.83%
Deval Patrick	0.19%	0.50%	0.43%	31.24%	36.61%	31.04%
Elizabeth Warren	15.58%	26.49%	18.43%	13.88%	13.62%	12.00%
Joe Biden	0.99%	4.16%	9.79%	15.97%	28.82%	40.28%
John Delaney	13.80%	21.32%	13.83%	11.73%	16.13%	23.19%
Marianne Williamson	3.83%	10.16%	14.25%	19.48%	27.47%	24.81%
Michael Bennet	4.91%	14.40%	17.56%	19.14%	21.64%	22.36%
Michael Bloomberg	16.53%	32.93%	23.73%	14.37%	7.66%	4.78%
Pete Buttigieg	4.77%	10.72%	14.75%	19.75%	25.58%	24.43%
Tom Steyer	9.37%	14.60%	13.09%	15.41%	23.00%	24.54%
Tulsi Gabbard	8.04%	22.40%	18.89%	18.15%	18.21%	14.31%
Grand Total	8.17%	16.78%	14.59%	16.78%	21.01%	22.69%

What does this all mean? It may be too early to tell, but some thoughts to consider as we await early indicators in Iowa and New Hampshire.

Will it become a two way race among Biden and whomever wins the hearts and minds of Millennials and Gen Z, likely Sanders, Warren, Yang or Bloomberg if he can continue to gain momentum?

How does Buttigieg play into this as his polling numbers aren't as high nationally as Biden, Sanders and Warren, but he has gained supporters proportionally across generations and some think he is poised to overperform in Iowa and New Hampshire. Is this because his candidacy appeals to these differing audiences, or because he has invested in making his case across generations? Buttigieg has consistently spent significant dollars on Facebook advertising across age groups throughout 2019 based on our tracking, whereas candidates besides he and Warren have spent a much higher proportion of their Facebook ad budgets targeting audiences predisposed to support them. Is Warren in a similar position of polling relatively evenly across ages since she appeals to various generations, or since she also consistently invested her Facebook advertising spend across generations?

Since there is a direct correlation between every candidate's 2019 Facebook ad spending against various age groups and how they are polling with these age groups, it's reasonable to suggest there may be a correlation. This is a conundrum of what comes first, the chicken or the egg? Did an investment in reaching various audiences lead to this outcome, or were these audiences predisposed to support these candidates and their investment reaching these audiences reinforced their position in the polls with these audiences? Does Biden not appeal to Millennials or Gen Z, or has he strategically spent his resources elsewhere and not targeted them much yet at this phase of the election since his math tells him he can win the primary if he turns out Boomers well?

Let's look at how Facebook advertising works and how it may have influenced these outcomes.

Facebook is set up to make it easy for anyone to run ads as its algorithm finds people who support you (e.g., candidate, brand, small business) and sets out to find "lookalike audiences." This feature is just how it sounds as it finds more people who look like your followers/supporters and gets your Facebook ads in front of similar "lookalike" audiences. It was initially set up for brands and ecommerce retailers to generate followers and ecommerce sales leads, and this approach is the best way to generate those results. In a political context, it's also the best way to expand one's base of supporters and the all so coveted supporters who donate. It essentially doubles down on who likes you and finds more of them to bring them into your campaign. It also makes your digital agency or internal digital team feel good about

their KPIs and ROI as it should lead to more followers, and more donors, if used effectively. However, in order to win a general election and arguably a hotly contested primary, candidates also need to persuade undecideds to support their candidacy, not just speak to their base of supporters. This takes a concerted and disciplined approach to digital, and Facebook advertising specifically.

Some suggest Facebook advertising, and social media more broadly, carried Trump to victory in 2016 and may do so again in 2020. Trump has embraced the power of digital as his campaign is the first in history to have a campaign manager whose expertise is in digital media. Not surprisingly we are seeing the Trump campaign both invest heavily in Facebook ads while churning out a high volume of different ad units with often very small spends behind them. This approach suggests the campaign is consistently testing ad creative with slight variations of the same ad whether that be minor word changes, different colors, and/or a different photo. What the Trump campaign understands is the beauty and the challenge related to Facebook advertising is it requires maximizing the "lookalike" audiences functionality to extend one's base, while testing, learning and optimizing what ads work with both your base, and various undecided audiences. Unlike broadcast where you typically reach a wide range of ages and interests in one TV ad, one can customize Facebook ads around one's age and interests and only those audiences see that ad. So you can serve an ad that is specific to one's interest in climate change, gun safety or women's rights for example, not simply a general ad about one's overall candidacy. You can also ensure that a person who has no interest in a particular issue (e.g., social security with a younger audience) does not see ads that won't resonate with their interests, while that same ad may generate great results with audiences passionate about that issue. To do so, it often requires taking offline data and marrying it with online data, and creating a host of various ad units that are tailored to these different audiences. Once you strike gold and see results from these efforts with new audiences, you then use Facebook's lookalike audiences and the same creative to pull in more and more of these "new" audiences of supporters. It, however, requires a belief in the power of digital and the expertise, investment and discipline to extend one's reach beyond one's base. The counter-argument to this approach is that doubling down on one's base is how to best win the primary. Campaigns may argue this is why they have invested where they've invested, and they'll transition their digital strategy to a broader focus reaching both their base and persuadables for the general election. To that I say, "OK Boomer."

(About the author: Aaron Earls is a proud Gen Xer who has been on the bleeding edge of digital and campaigning since 1999, and believes a good offense is the best defense. He is the Co-Founder and CCO of Booster.)

About [Booster](#)

Booster is based in Boston with offices in New York, and Washington, DC and funded by private investors. Founded by seasoned entrepreneurs in digital advertising with a mission to democratize social media influence, Booster launched with a handful of Congressional Candidates, PAC's and Non-Profit clients in the run up to the 2018 mid-term elections. Booster's early traction with 2020 Presidential Candidates including Governor Bullock, led to incremental private investment, establishment of an experienced Advisory Board, and incorporation as a Public Benefit Corporation (B-Corp Certification pending) in early 2019.