

Twitter: The digital town square of free speech?

By  Danette Breitenbach

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Twitter, which has been a hub of public discourse and a flashpoint in the debate over online free speech before, has seen the resurfacing of this debate with the announcement that Twitter will be sold to Tesla titan Elon Musk, and going private.



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With more than 83 million followers, Musk is one of its most prolific users.



Elon Musk buys Twitter for \$44bn

Katja Hamilton 26 Apr 2022



Musk, who calls himself a free speech absolutist, has criticised Twitter's moderation says [Reuters](#).

But what does Musk mean by free speech? In a tweet on Monday, he wrote, "I hope that even my worst critics remain on Twitter, because that is what free speech means."

Reuters said: "He (Musk) wants Twitter's algorithm for prioritizing tweets to be public and objects to giving too much power

on the service to corporations that advertise."

It further reports that political activists expect that a Musk regime will mean less moderation and reinstatement of banned individuals including former President Donald Trump.

However, Trump told [CNBC](#) on Monday he wouldn't return to Twitter even if Musk reversed the former president's ban, saying that he'll be on his own service, Truth Social, "within a week".

Twitter is the digital town square

Despite this, *Reuters* said: "Conservatives cheered the prospect of fewer controls while some human rights activists voiced fears of a rise in hate speech. Musk has also advocated user-friendly tweaks to the service, such as an edit button and defeating "spam bots" that send overwhelming amounts of unwanted tweets."

In a statement on Monday Musk said: "Free speech is the bedrock of a functioning democracy, and Twitter is the digital town square where matters vital to the future of humanity are debated."

The richest man in the world began amassing a stake of about 9% in January.

"By March, he had ramped up his criticism of Twitter, alleging that the company's algorithms are biased and feeds cluttered with automated junk posts. He also suggested Twitter's user growth was inflated by bots," says [Aljazeera](#).

After rejecting an invitation to join the company's board, on 14 April, he offered to take Twitter private, saying he'd make the platform a bastion of free speech and dropping other hints about the changes he'd make as owner.

“ In principle, I don't believe anyone should own or run Twitter. It wants to be a public good at a protocol level, not a company. Solving for the problem of it being a company however, Elon is the singular solution I trust. I trust his mission to extend the light of consciousness.—jack (Twitter) (@jack) April 26, 2022 ”

Staff in an uproar, not happy

While Musk stated: "Twitter has tremendous potential – I look forward to working with the company and the community of users to unlock it", it appears that his enthusiasm is not shared by many Twitter employees who have expressed their views on the platform.

'I feel like im going to throw up..I rly don't wanna work for a company that is owned by Elon Musk,' one staffer said.

Another Twitter employee reportedly complained: 'I don't rly know what I'm supposed to do...oh my god, my phone's been blowing up...We have a meeting about it at 5pm...the CEO is going to address everyone about it. I hate (Musk) him, why does he even want this?'

“ Its “absolutely insane” @ Twitter right now in the virtual valves of private slack rooms & employee group texts, according to an internal source. Their take/breakdown just now: “I feel like im going to throw up..I rly don't wanna work for a company that is owned by Elon Musk”...1/— talmon joseph smith (@talmonsmith) April 25, 2022 ”

In its internal message rooms there was uproar reports [The New York Times](#).

CEO Parag Agrawal and Bret Taylor, the chair of the board addressed staff at 5pm ET on Monday.

"It's important to acknowledge that all of you have many different feelings about what is happening. Some of you are

concerned, some are you are excited, and some of you are waiting to see how this goes. I know this affects all of you personally. It is an emotional day, and I just want to acknowledge it," Agrawal said, according to two people who attended the meeting and spoke to *The New York Times*.

Staff have been told that their jobs are safe for at least six months, until Musk takes over under the terms of a \$44 billion deal according to [The Mail Online](#).

Struggled to generate revenue

By taking the company private, Musk has to figure out a whole new structure for employee pay. However the tech industry is dealing with a tightening and highly competitive market for talent, with employers are under more pressure than ever to retain what they've got.

And despite its reach and impact, the San Francisco-based one-to-many messaging platform has struggled to generate the kind of revenue seen by social media peers such as Facebook and TikTok.

Since its founding in March of 2006, Twitter has amassed 217 million daily active users, more than 80% of them outside the US, but it did not taste profit until the end of 2017, and the following year was its first to finish financially in the black.

Twitter reported a loss of \$221m last year.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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