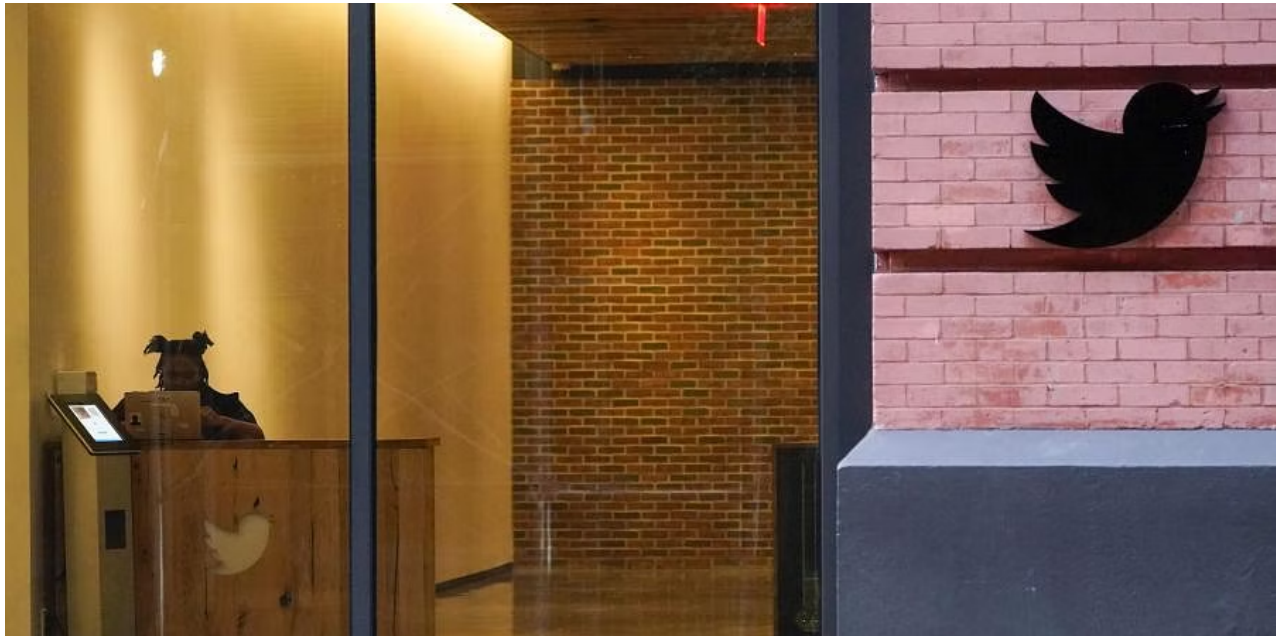


What does Musk's recent acquisition of Twitter point towards?

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Twitter is now more about Elon Musk than Twitter: The lobby of the building that houses the Twitter office in New York. (Representational Image/ Photo | AP)

By [Nikhil Naren](#)

What is the Chief of Tesla and SpaceX up to with his latest acquisition, Twitter, the microblogging platform with an active userbase of 329 million and monetizable daily active userbase of 240 million? He appears to be overhauling it both on the inside and the outside.

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Earlier 'Chief Twit' and now 'Twitter Complaint Hotline Operator' (yes, that's what Musk's Twitter description reads!) had previously shown concerns about lack of end-to-end encryption in the Twitter DMs and advocated for making Twitter an inclusive arena for free speech. Musk had earlier remarked that Twitter has become kind of the de facto town square. Many argued that Twitter can't be the public square because most of the public doesn't even use it and is far smaller than any other social media platform. Will his push for promoting free speech on the platform lead to loosening of the standards for content moderation? It has been evident that



the 'chief' isn't a fan of Twitter's content moderation efforts and has continuously advocated for stronger protections of freedom of speech on social media platforms. Hence, he may presumably move the company closer to his perspective as its new owner and likely remove some content moderation practices and be less likely to remove tweets that, to him, fall within a gray area.



His note to advertisers described the takeover as a 'philanthropic venture' which was aimed to help humanity, that he loves. While prima facie this may sound praiseworthy, the evolution of social media platforms represents something radically new, and we are still learning about the impact that they have on people's cognitive-processing abilities, emotions, and behavior. I am sure we can easily recollect instances where we brooded the potential destruction of truth, democracy, and humanity through such platforms [and which is something that Musk claims to hold so dear to him!].

Twitter's struggle with privacy and security issues has been ongoing for years, with no concrete fixes put in place. While it can be said that whatever we do on the internet stays on forever, it is quite possible that everything Twitter users did or said on the platform albeit public or private, now belongs to one of the wealthiest individuals on Earth. How cool is that? Reference here can be drawn to Clause 3 of Twitter's Privacy Policy that states the mode of 'Sharing Information', and clause 3.5 specifically states that- Twitter may share, sell, or transfer information about its users' in connection with a merger, acquisition, reorganization, sale of assets, or bankruptcy; precisely the case with Musk's acquisition. This also should be a good reminder for us, as users of such platforms, that our data is only as private as the company we give it to wants it to be!

Twitter users may want to worry more about their data spilling to everyone than about it leaking to Musk. Twitter already has a poor track record when it comes to security, and Musk may end up firing staff members who are crucial to preserving the safeguards the company has in place that work. Further, Musk plans to take Twitter private, post assuming ownership, which will make the platform less accountable due to the loosening of government oversight and more freedom to make decisions. With a platform that is politically motivated, and uses the best technological tools for platform governance, such moves can have ramifications for public discussion and electoral discourse as well. A report that studied the algorithmic amplification of politics on Twitter unveiled that the political right enjoys higher amplification compared to the political left, and further showed that in six out of seven countries studied, conservative politicians enjoy higher algorithmic amplification than liberal ones. Musk has been fearful of the capacity that artificial intelligence entails to enslave humanity; therefore, we might witness him apply brakes on the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence [and its related usage on Twitter] without appropriate human safeguards.

While the revenues of Twitter have witnessed steady growth, with majority coming from the advertisement vertical, the user engagement on Twitter has dropped year over year, and a study conducted by the Pew Research Centre found that in the United States, merely 10% of Twitter users are responsible for producing 92% of all tweets. Twitter was

earlier exploring its plans for having the option to let users put video content behind a paywall, however, it is not clear if this plan predates Musk's acquisition. Using paywalled videos might also raise concerns about the spread of Child Sexual Abuse Materials (CSAM) on the platform. With Twitter confirming a subscription fee of \$8/month for blue-tick verification, we shouldn't be surprised if more such subscription-based models are introduced which point toward Musk's intention of exploring more such non-advertising sources of revenues.

However, one of Musk's recent tweets -- "Buying Twitter is an accelerant to creating X, the everything app" -- indicates that he sees Twitter as a foundation for creating an application that offers everything from money transfers to shopping and ride-hailing. Therefore, the bigger picture might not be just about Twitter, but about creating an everything app. This portrayal is extremely similar to how Kevin Kelly defined artificial intelligence- if he has x, he will add AI to his x. It portrayed a notion that an AI in one shape, way, or form, or in any shape or form, is going to permeate every aspect of human endeavor. Is this what Musk's recent acquisition pointing towards? I believe we'll all soon figure that out!

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