

A BIRD IN THE HAND: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON TWITTER UNDER ELON MUSK

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: IT, Internet and Communications

Of all the social media behemoths today, [Twitter, Inc.](#) is a curious creature. It has nearly 240 million “daily access” users, which includes political and corporate leaders besides personalities who command an immense following. Twitter’s unique selling point is its provision to not only put up 280-character messages but also be a platform featuring the dissemination of information, as breaking news, debates, discussion and even for the mobilisation of people. Yet, financially, Twitter has posted losses in eight out of the last 10 years, with its market value never managing to reach the heights of peers such as Meta’s Facebook and Instagram or even Tiktok. By selling the company to the world’s richest man, Elon Musk, for [a whopping \\$44 billion](#) after a few shenanigans, Twitter’s shareholders finally made a killing even as Mr. Musk, in his first post-acquisition actions, [fired some top executives](#). But the question on everyone’s minds is about what might happen to the platform as a free speech vehicle under a truly maverick owner. Mr. Musk, who has made most of his money as the owner of electric vehicle company Tesla and spacecraft and exploration venture SpaceX, could provide business ideas that could secure the firm’s finances. Yet, as a Twitter user with the third highest number of followers, he has been prone to erratic outbursts, silly posturing and crass remarks, and frowning upon regulation by the company of its content in the past, begging the question whether the ownership change will lead to a deterioration in content standards.

Twitter, like other social media giants, has faced difficulties in ridding its platform of disinformation, harassment through trolling, hate speech and calls for violence. Recently, it [blocked former U.S. President Donald Trump](#), a popular yet incendiary user, and started flagging select posts for misleading content or propaganda. For Indian users, the aforementioned challenges have been exacerbated by the Government seeking ways to control content, a scarier proposition, through changes to Internet intermediary rules. While Mr. Musk has argued for a freer space with little regulation, he has, since his purchase, tempered those views in favour of better and cleaner moderation of content, ostensibly to not lose advertisers wary of lending their brand to problematic content. While it remains to be seen if this is merely yet another instance of Mr. Musk’s posturing, the larger question of whether Twitter will remain a relevant brand will be answered in the manner in which the world’s richest man will treat governments and establishments in keeping reasonable and free speech intact on the platform and not subsume it to his business interests.

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