

Twitter cuts more staff as Musk turmoil grows

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Elon Musk making Twitter more open to hateful, harmful or dishonest tweets at Twitter could be ramping up financial pressure on the tech firm the Tesla chief bought late last year in a \$44 billion deal.

Reports of more layoffs at Twitter landed on Monday as owner Elon Musk waded into a racism controversy that risked pushing advertisers

further away from the struggling platform.

Musk called US media "racist" on Sunday after multiple American newspapers announced they would stop publishing a popular comic strip whose creator called Black people a hate group.

Musk, chief of electric car company Tesla and Twitter, made his comment in regard to backlash to a rant by Scott Adams, creator of the long-running "Dilbert" comic strip—a satirical take on office life.

Adams, like Musk, has increasingly stoked controversy with his views on social issues.

"For a 'very' long time, US media was racist against non-white people, now they're racist against whites & Asians," Musk wrote in a post on Twitter, where he has reinstated thousands of users banned for hate speech.

"Same thing happened with elite colleges & high schools in America. Maybe they can try not being racist."

Under Musk's leadership, Tesla has been hit with multiple lawsuits alleging racism and researchers say hate speech has flourished at Twitter since his takeover.

"It's as though Elon Musk is on a whirlwind tour to try to put Twitter out of business," said independent tech analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group.

"All he has to do is keep quiet, but he has to constantly spout stuff that alienates advertisers."

No 'mistake'

The controversy came as the New York Times reported that Twitter had laid off at least 200 employees, or 10 percent of its already decimated workforce.

The fresh round of layoffs included product managers, big data experts and engineers working on machine learning and platform reliability.

Twitter did not immediately confirm the reports when contacted by AFP.

Esther Crawford, in charge of the social network's product development, confirmed on Twitter that she was one of the employees let go.

Crawford was among the few remaining Twitter executives from before its October acquisition by Musk who had not resigned or been fired.

Head of the new Twitter Blue verification program, she had been a staunch supporter of Musk and the company, going so far as to retweet a photo of herself sleeping in a sleeping bag at her workplace.

"The worst take you could have from watching me go all-in on Twitter 2.0 is that my optimism or hard work was a mistake," she wrote on Twitter.

Another senior employee, Martijn de Kuijper, tweeted on Saturday that it "looks like I'm let go" after he could no longer access his emails from a French Alps ski holiday.

Since Musk took ownership of Twitter, the platform has been riven by chaos, with mass layoffs, the return of thousands of banned accounts and major advertisers fleeing.

The app has also seen a string of technical snafus, including an incident

where tweets by Musk suddenly dominated the feeds of millions of users, even those not following the tycoon.

Meanwhile, Musk has encouraged users to communicate more freely on Twitter and said the site would impose the least amount of censorship allowed by law.

"Right now, you would have to be an idiot to advertise on Twitter," analyst Enderle said of the potential for marketing messages to appear near vile or harmful tweets.

"There is just too much downside risk of damaging your brand and alienating your customers."

With Twitter now a private company, internal data is not readily available, but analysis by firm Pathmatics by Sensor Tower found that more than half of Twitter's top 1,000 advertisers in September were no longer spending on the platform in January.

Musk has tried to wean Twitter from advertising and promote subscriptions as a new way to bring in cash—an idea that Facebook-owner Meta is testing as well—but so far the results have been disappointing.

According to industry website The Information, around 180,000 people in the US were paying for Twitter as of mid-January, which counted for less than 0.2 percent of monthly active users.

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