Advertisers drop X after Musk backs anti-Semitic post

November 18 2023, by Glenn CHAPMAN

Elon Musk bought Twitter, now known as X, nearly a year ago for $44 billion.

An exodus of big-name advertisers appeared under way at X, formerly Twitter, on Friday in the wake of Elon Musk endorsing an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory.

Nonprofit group Media Matters added Apple, Disney, Comcast, Lionsgate Entertainment, and Paramount Global to its list of companies pausing advertising on X.

"Lionsgate has suspended advertising on X because of Elon Musk's recent antisemitic tweets," a spokesperson for the motion picture production and distribution company told AFP.

IBM on Thursday said it stopped advertising on X due to a report its ads were shown next to pro-Nazi posts at X.

Apple and Disney did not reply to requests for comment.

"Major blue-chip companies are announcing they will suspend all advertising," the group said on a web page featuring a running list.

White House rebuke

The White House on Friday condemned Musk, the world's richest person, for "abhorrent promotion" of anti-Semitism.

The White House was reacting to a post by Musk in which the controversial Tesla and SpaceX tycoon replied to an anti-Semitic post on X with the words: "You have said the actual truth."

The original post has been perceived by the White House and the US media as a reference to a longtime conspiracy theory among White supremacists that Jews have a secret plan to bring in illegal immigrants to weaken white majorities.

Most notoriously, the idea was promoted by the man who carried out a mass shooting at a synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018, killing 11 people.

Referring to Musk's post, White House spokesman Andrew Bates said it was "unacceptable" to repeat such a "hideous lie."

"We condemn this abhorrent promotion of anti-Semitic and racist hate in the strongest terms, which runs against our core values as Americans," Bates said.

'Musk-induced chaos'

In the year since taking over Twitter, now rebranded as X, Musk has gutted content moderation, restored accounts of previously banned extremists, and allowed users to purchase account verification, helping them profit from viral—but often inaccurate—posts.

A recent study by the disinformation monitoring group NewsGuard found that paying subscribers at X were the big spreaders of misinformation about the Israel-Hamas war.

"During all of this Musk-induced chaos, corporate advertisements have also been appearing on pro-Hitler, Holocaust denial, white nationalist, pro-violence, and neo-Nazi accounts," Media Matters said in a post displaying samples of what it found at X.

Media Matters reported that it found Apple, Oracle and IBM ads displayed next to posts touting Hitler and the Nazi Party on X.

"IBM has zero tolerance for hate speech and discrimination and we have immediately suspended all advertising on X while we investigate this entirely unacceptable situation," the New York-based tech firm said in response to an AFP inquiry.

An X executive told AFP that it did a "sweep" of accounts pointed out by Media Matters and they will no longer be able to make money from

ads.

The posts themselves will be labeled "sensitive [media](#)," according to the executive.

"Ads follow the people on X, in this case the Media Matter's researcher that was going to actively look for this content—that's how user targeting works," the executive said in an emailed reply.

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