

It is time for users of X to delete their accounts



LSE's Bart Cammaerts explains why he believes users of X should leave the increasingly toxic social media platform.

Since Elon Musk bought Twitter [in October 2022](#) for \$44 billion and renamed it X, the social media platform has turned into a cesspit of hate, vitriol and a safe haven for trolls and extreme right fascist rhetoric. To hammer the point home, Musk changed his bio in January of this year to *Chief Troll Officer (CTO)*. As I explain below, the evidence is mounting that X is increasingly a toxic space. To put it in the British media and communications regulator Ofcom's terms, Musk is [neither fit nor proper](#) to run such an important platform in the global media and communication eco-system.

One month after acquiring Twitter, Musk announced a 'general amnesty' to a whole range of accounts that had previously been banned by Twitter for hateful conduct or for spreading misinformation about COVID and elections, and imagery of child sexual exploitation. BBC monitoring [found](#) that almost 20% of the reinstated accounts were accounts advocating and propagating hate and violence. A year later, in November 2023, Musk decided to [reinstate](#) the accounts of the English Defence League (EDL)-leader Stephen Yaxley-Lennon aka Tommy Robinson and extreme right agitator Katie Hopkins. The accounts of self-proclaimed misogynist [Andrew Tate](#) (currently subject to [police investigations](#) into human trafficking and rape) and far-right conspiracy theorist [Alex Jones](#) were also reinstated.

Furthermore, Musk gradually got rid of most of the moderation rules and staff tasked to enforce them. In addition to this, as co-director of non-profit New Public [Eli Pariser](#) recently stated in the Financial Times, Musk removed and laid off "whatever

infrastructure existed for some transparency into how Twitter was making decisions and what its community guidelines were and how it is being enforced". Pariser also argued that this higher degree of opacity has enabled Musk to "make more spur of the moment impulsive decisions" without any form of accountability. Musk is also using his algorithmic power to propagate extreme right discourses, conspiracy theories and election misinformation. Police, the UK government, analysts and commentators were also unequivocal in their assessment that the recent extreme right race riots in the UK were [fuelled](#) by X and by Musk personally.

While Musk presents himself as a 'free speech absolutist', it is foremost his free speech and the free speech of those that align with his views that are protected (and algorithmically boosted). The same does not necessarily apply to those he disagrees with or those who critique autocratic leaders in the Global South. With regard to the latter, X had no qualms [responding](#) positively to calls of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ban journalists and critics of his regime or censor a BBC documentary on human rights abuses perpetrated by Modi. Similarly, Musk also [complied](#) with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's requests to censor critics of his regime.

Besides this, in May 2024, users of X [reported](#) that using the terms cis or cisgender on the platform led to shadow banning posts and users (a practice whereby platforms algorithmically reduce the visibility of content or users), and they received messages from X stating that: "This post contains language that may be considered a slur by X and could be used in a harmful manner in violation of our rules". In recent months, Musk also briefly suspended the account of *White Dudes for Harris* on the back of a successful fundraising call raising more than \$4 million for the Harris campaign; they also [reported](#) that their account was subsequently labelled as spam by X. It led the Washington Post to [opine](#) that: "Sometimes it's easy to forget that Twitter isn't Twitter anymore. Until Elon Musk, or his invisible hand, comes along and reminds us".

All this begs the question as to why so many governments, politicians, journalists, and indeed academics are still active on X, feeding its algorithm and being part and parcel of its business model (although there are more and more [signs](#) that advertisers are leaving and that X is a loss-making venture for Musk).

Full disclosure: I have never had a Twitter account, nor an X account. But hasn't the time come for those who do, to reflect if X is a space they want to be seen to be active? For

instance, shouldn't the UK government officially announce they are leaving X, following the lead of many Labour MPs who [decided](#) to jump ship? There are plenty of alternatives out there (Threads, Blue Sky, Mastodon, to name a few). These are not unproblematic either, but at least they have moderation policies that are enforced.

The main reason this is not happening relates to the so-called [winner-takes-all](#) effect that characterises platform capitalism. People stay on X because the people they want to reach are also on X and as Lewis Goodall of the popular podcast *The News Agents* [put it](#) recently in a discussion on leaving X (or not), it also means losing that audience of followers meticulously built-up over many years. The question users of X should ask themselves is: haven't enough red lines been crossed to delete accounts *en masse* and thereby reduce the impact and influence of X and Musk (further)? I think we have reached that moment.

This post represents the views of the author and not the position of the Media@LSE blog, nor of the London School of Economics and Political Science.

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