Report: Musk had Twitter engineers boost his tweets after Biden got more views

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Twitter CEO Elon Musk had Twitter engineers set up a “special system” to boost his tweets after his post about the Super Bowl got fewer views than a tweet from President Biden, according to a report by Platformer yesterday.

Biden’s tweet supporting the Philadelphia Eagles has 29.1 million views, while Musk’s now-deleted tweet also supporting the Eagles received a mere 9.1 million. Hours after the Eagles’ loss, Musk’s cousin James Musk posted a message in Twitter’s Slack asking anyone “who can make dashboards and write software” to help with “debugging an issue with engagement across the platform,” the report said. James Musk’s Slack message reportedly called the situation one of “high urgency.”

Additionally, Elon Musk “flew his private jet back to the Bay Area on Sunday night to demand answers from his team.”

“Late Sunday night, Musk addressed his team in-person,” Platformer wrote. “Roughly 80 people were pulled in to work on the project, which had quickly become priority number one at

the company. Employees worked through the night investigating various hypotheses about why Musk's tweets weren't reaching as many people as he thought they should and testing out possible solutions."

Fix it or you're fired

Earlier this month, Musk reportedly fired an engineer who tried to explain why his tweet views were down. More firings were threatened as Musk's "deputies told the rest of the engineering team this weekend that if the engagement issue wasn't 'fixed,' they would all lose their jobs as well," the Platformer report said.

A solution was found by Monday. Musk's newfound reach was immediately noticeable to users in the default "For You" feed that isn't limited to accounts each user follows.

"Twitter users opened the app to find that Musk's posts overwhelmed their ranked timeline," and this "was no accident, Platformer can confirm: after Musk threatened to fire his remaining engineers, they built a system designed to ensure that Musk—and Musk alone—benefits from previously unheard-of promotion of his tweets to the entire user base." Platformer said its report is "based on interviews with people familiar with the events involved and supported by documents."

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While engineers said it's possible that "Musk's reach might have been reduced because he'd been blocked and muted by so many people in recent months," there also may have been a technical reason for Musk's relatively low views.

"Twitter's system has historically promoted tweets from users whose posts perform better to both followers and non-followers in the For You Tab; Musk's tweets should have fit that model but showed up less only about half the time that some engineers thought they should, according to some internal

estimates," Platformer wrote.

Musk has tweeted about his view count on multiple occasions. The Twitter owner and CEO temporarily made his account private a couple of weeks ago, saying he wanted "to test whether you see my private tweets more than my public ones." Shortly before the Super Bowl, he wrote that Twitter addressed a problem in which the "Fanout service for Following feed was getting overloaded when I tweeted, resulting in up to 95% of my tweets not getting delivered at all."

Musk gets "power user multiplier"

To boost Musk's tweet views after the Super Bowl, Twitter engineers "deployed code to automatically 'greenlight' all of Musk's tweets, meaning his tweets will bypass Twitter's filters designed to show people the best content possible. The algorithm now artificially boosted Musk's tweets by a factor of 1,000—a constant score that ensured his tweets rank higher than anyone else's in the feed," Platformer wrote.

This is called a "power user multiplier" internally, but it "only applies to Elon Musk"; it "bypass[es] Twitter heuristics that would otherwise prevent a single account from flooding" the For You ranked feed, Platformer wrote.

After the change, Musk posted a meme indicating he was aware that his tweets were being forced into people's feeds. The meme tweet has drawn 148.9 million views. According to Platformer, the multiplier for Musk's account was subsequently lowered a bit, so it's less than 1,000 now.

"Please stay tuned while we make adjustments to the uh .… 'algorithm,'" Musk wrote in a subsequent tweet that got 54.8 million views.

Musk made himself the Twitter CEO after buying the company in late October, but has said he won't keep the job indefinitely.

Musk reportedly said today that “toward the end of this year should be a good timing to find someone else to run the company.” Before ceding the CEO job, Musk said he wants to make sure Twitter is “in stable condition.”

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