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Inside C2

# Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

Southern Daily News is published by Southern News Group Daily

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Monday, November 07 2022

## Twitter lays off staff as Musk blames activists for 'massive' ad revenue

Nov 4 (Reuters) - Twitter Inc started a major round of layoffs on Friday, alerting employees of their job status by email after barring the entrances to offices and cutting off workers' access to internal systems overnight.

The move follows a week of chaos and uncertainty about the company's future under new owner Elon Musk, the world's richest person, who tweeted on Friday that the service was experiencing a "massive drop in revenue" as advertisers pulled spending.

Musk blamed the losses on a coalition of civil rights groups that has been pressing Twitter's top advertisers to take action if he did not protect content moderation. The groups said on Friday they are escalating their pressure and demanding brands pull their Twitter ads globally.

"In an effort to place Twitter on a healthy path, we will go through the difficult process of reducing our global workforce on Friday," Twitter said in an email to staff on Thursday evening announcing the cuts that came on Friday, which was seen by Reuters.

EXCLUSIVE Telcos push EU to make Big Tech pay for network costs



Explainer: Will Twitter layoffs violate U.S. law?  
Crypto exchange Binance helped Iranian firms trade \$8 billion despite sanctions  
Apple to expand live TV advertising around new soccer deal -Bloomberg News  
The company was silent about the depth of the cuts, although internal plans reviewed by Reuters this week indicated Musk was looking to cut around 3,700 Twitter staff, or about half the workforce.

Staff who worked in engineering, communications, product, content curation and machine learning ethics were among those impacted by the layoffs, according to tweets from Twitter staff.

Shannon Raj Singh, an attorney who was Twitter's acting head of human rights, tweeted on Friday that the entire human rights team at the company had been cut.

Musk has promised to restore free speech while preventing Twitter from descending into a "hellscape." However, his reassurances have failed to calm major advertisers, which have expressed apprehension about his takeover for months.

Volkswagen AG (VOWG\_p.DE) recommended its brands pause paid advertising on Twitter until further notice in the wake of Musk's takeover, it said on Friday. Its comments echoed similar remarks from other companies, including General Motors Co (GM.N) and General Mills Inc (GIS.N).

Angelo Carusone, president of Media Matters

for America, which is part of the civil rights coalition, said he knew of two more major advertisers that were preparing to announce that they would pause ads on the platform.

Musk tweeted that his team had made no changes to content moderation and done "everything we could" to appease the groups. "Extremely messed up! They're (civil right groups) trying to destroy free speech in America."

Speaking at an investors conference in New York on Friday, Musk called the activist pressure "an attack on the First Amendment."

Twitter did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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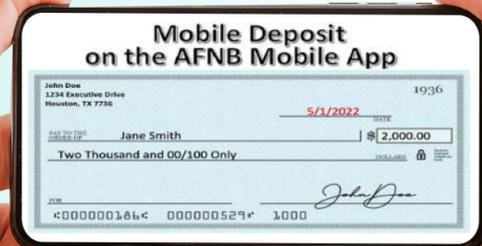
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# OPEC+ oil output cut shows widening rift between Biden and Saudi royals

WASHINGTON/LONDON, Oct 7(Reuters) - The OPEC+ organization's decision this week to cut oil production despite stiff U.S. opposition has further strained already tense relations between President Joe Biden's White House and Saudi Arabia's royal family, once one of Washington's staunchest Middle East allies, according to interviews with about a dozen government officials and experts in Washington and the Gulf.

The White House pushed hard to prevent the OPEC output cut, these sources said. Biden hopes to keep U.S. gasoline prices from spiking again ahead of midterm elections in which his Democratic party is struggling to maintain control of the U.S. Congress. Washington also wants to limit Russia's energy revenue during the Ukraine war.

The U.S. administration lobbied OPEC+ for weeks. In recent days, senior U.S. officials from energy, foreign policy and economic teams urged their foreign counterparts to vote against an output cut, according to two sources familiar with the discussions.

Amos Hochstein, Biden's top energy envoy, along with national security official Brett McGurk and the administration's special envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking, traveled to Saudi Arabia last month to discuss energy issues, including the OPEC+ decision.

Danielle Smith, new premier of Canada's oil-rich Alberta, set to defy Trudeau

NYC mayor declares state of emergency amid migrant busing crisis  
Analysis: Defeats in Ukraine stoke crisis for Vladimir Putin  
Putin orders Russia to seize Exxon-led Sakhalin 1 oil and gas project  
They failed to prevent an output cut, just as Biden did after his own July visit.

US officials "tried to position it as 'us versus Russia,'" said one source briefed on the discussions, telling Saudi officials they needed to make a choice.

That argument failed, the source said, adding that the Saudis said that if the United States wanted more oil on the markets, it should start producing more of its own.

The United States is the world's No. 1 oil producer and also its top consumer, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

The Saudi government media office CIC did not respond to Reuters emailed requests for comment about the discussions.



"We are concerned first and foremost with the interests of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and then the interests of the countries that trusted us and are members of OPEC and the OPEC + alliance," Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz told Saudi TV Wednesday. OPEC weighs its interests with "those of the world because we have an interest in supporting the growth of the global economy and providing energy supplies in the best way," he said.

Washington's handling of the Iran nuclear deal and withdrawal of support for a Saudi-led coalition's offensive military operations in Yemen have upset Saudi officials, as have actions against Russia after the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

A U.S. push for a price cap on Russian oil is caus-

ing uncertainty, Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told Bloomberg TV after the OPEC cut, noting the "lack of details and the lack of clarity" about how it will be implemented.

A source briefed by Saudi officials said the kingdom views it as "a non-market price-control mechanism, that could be used by a cartel of consumers against producers."

A Biden-directed sale of 180 million barrels of oil in March from the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve put downward pressure on oil prices. In March, OPEC+ said it would stop using data from the International Energy Agency (IEA), a Western oil watchdog, due to Saudi-led concerns the United States had too much influence.

On Thursday, Biden called the Saudi decision "a disappointment", adding Washington could take further action in the oil market.

## Editor's Choice



Theopiste Maloko, 42, a local health official, and a nurse collect skin samples from Angelika Lifafu, 6, to test for monkeypox, at the Yalolia health centre, in Tshopo, Democratic Republic of Congo. Without treatment, Angelika can only wait for the illness to run its course. Ahead of her lies a myriad of possible outcomes including recovery, blindness, or, as was the case with a family



Former U.S. President Barack Obama speaks at a campaign rally for Senator Raphael Warnock ahead of the midterm elections in Atlanta, Georgia, October 28. REUTERS/Dustin Chambers



Cesar, 34, a pilgrim from Mexico, walks on the San Antolin beach while continuing his pilgrimage in the "Camino de Santiago del Norte", in Llanes, Spain. REUTERS/Nacho Doce



Ukrainian service members shoot in the air during a funeral ceremony for their brother-in-arm Armen Petrosian, 50, who was recently killed in a fight against Russian troops during the liberation of Kharkiv region, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Perechyn, Zakarpattia region, Ukraine. REUTERS/Serhii Hudak



A woman wades through chest-deep flood water after Super Typhoon Noru, in San Ildefonso, Bulacan province, Philippines, . REUTERS/Eloisa Lopez



People watch a TV broadcasting a news report on North Korea firing a ballistic missile toward the sea off its east coast, in Seoul, South Korea, . REUTERS/ Kim Hong-Ji

MIT And Qatari Researchers Are Working To Expose Fake News Sources Rather Than Dispute Fake Postings

New Tool Fights Fake News By Exposing Websites That Create It

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



Many sites that generate fake news — disinformation masquerading as truth — share characteristics that distinguish them from journalistic outlets, according to researchers from MIT and the Qatar Computing Research Institute, who incorporated several of those characteristics into a dataset and then trained an algorithm to identify them. Their work could help fight a growing problem that many experts in government forecast will only get worse. Facebook, Twitter, and other social media outlets are building teams of fact checkers and supporting nonprofit organizations like First Draft to spot disinformation. But fact checking and verification takes a lot more time than pushing out disinformation. Also, fake news doesn't always match an expected pattern. Russia disinfo watchers have long observed that a key Kremlin tactic is to validate conspiratorial ideas on both sides of a given political debate (with the exception of gun control, to which they catered exclusively to pro-gun perspectives.)

That's why fighting disinfo piece-by-piece is like bailing a boat that's filling up faster than buckets can handle. What's worse, research has shown that news readers of all political persuasions become defensive and resistant to the idea that news they've accepted is fake, especially if the act of accepting—and then sharing—that news item furthered their standing within a selected social group.

All of this is why fake news spreads faster than accurately sourced articles, including ones that debunk conspiracy theories and disinformation.

According to experts in digital forensics from the International Institute of Cyber Security, this explains why fake news are disseminated faster than articles from accurate sources, including those that discredit conspiracy theories and misinformation.

The research presented reveals the key features of fake news websites that may be less visible to verifiers, such as functional words, specific word patterns that give greater force to news content.

If a news site launches a large number of

articles with a variety and high degree of these linguistic features, it can be easily inferred that they are more likely to publish unreliable "news".

"Automatic fact-checking lags behind in terms of accuracy, and it is generally not trusted by human users. In fact, even when done by reputable fact-checking organizations, debunking does little to convince those who already believe in false information," the researchers write.

Their study, "Predicting Factualty of Reporting and Bias of News Media Sources," forthcoming in the Proceedings of the 2018 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language, reveals key features of false news web sites that might be less visible to human fact checkers but can tab a bad news source.

Among the features: specific patterns of so-called "function words" that give a more spoken feel to a news article, as opposed to the far more common "content words." Mainstream news editors clamp down fast and hard on too many function words, but fake news sites may not be edited at all. The number and pattern of words that seem to express some sort of sentiment is another easy giveaway, as is the amount of user engagement and shares; linguistic indicators of bias around specific topics, (or bias generally), also work.



If a news site pumps out a lot of articles with a variety and high degree of these linguistic characteristics, you can safely infer that they're more likely to be publishing "news" that, well, isn't.

The researchers found that their algorithm, called the Support Vector Machine, could correctly deduce a high, low, or me-

dium level of "factualty" about 65 percent of the time. It could predict right- or left-leaning bias about 70 percent of the time. While not perfect, it's a big improvement over a raw guess (50 percent). The authors caution that the algorithm would work best with human fact checkers.

The next step, they write, is "characterizing the factualty of reporting for media in other languages. Finally, we want to go beyond left vs. right bias that is typical of the Western world and to model other kinds of biases that are more relevant for other regions, e.g., islamist vs. secular is one such example for the Muslim World." (Courtesy nextgov.com)

Related

NEWSGUARD WANTS TO FIGHT FAKE NEWS WITH HUMANS, NOT ALGORITHMS

Imagine you are scrolling through Facebook, you see an article that seems a little unusual, and you flag it. If Facebook's algorithm has decided you're trustworthy, the report then might go to the social network's third-party fact checkers. If they mark the story as false, Facebook will make sure fewer people see it in the News Feed. For those who see it anyway, Facebook will surface related articles with an alternative viewpoint just below the story. Every major platform—Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, and more—has some version of this process. But they all go about it in completely different ways, with every tech company writing its own rules and using black box algorithms to put them into practice. The patchwork nature of promoting trustworthy sources online has had the unintended consequence of seeding fears of bias.

That's one reason why a group of journalists and media executives are launching a tool called NewsGuard, a browser plug-in for Chrome and Microsoft Edge that transcends platforms, giving trustworthiness ratings to most of the internet's top-trafficked sites. Those ratings are based on assessments from an actual newsroom of

dozens of reporters who comprise NewsGuard's staff. They hail from a range of news organizations, including New York Daily News and GQ. Together, they've spent the last several months scoring thousands of news sites.



To vet the sites, they use a checklist of nine criteria that typically denote trustworthiness. Sites that don't clearly label advertising lose points, for example. Sites that have a coherent correction policy gain points. If you install NewsGuard and browse Google, Bing, Facebook, or Twitter, you'll see either a red or green icon next to every news source, a binary indicator of whether it meets NewsGuard's standards. Hover over the icon, and NewsGuard offers a full "nutrition label," with point-by-point descriptions of how it scored the site, and links to the bios of whoever scored them.

The tool is designed to maximize transparency, says Steve Brill, NewsGuard's cofounder, best known for founding the cable company Court TV. "We're trying to be the opposite of an algorithm," he says. Brill started NewsGuard with Gordon Crovitz, former publisher of The Wall Street Journal.

Along with the launch of the plug-in, NewsGuard is announcing partnerships with Microsoft as part of its Defending Democracy Program. The startup has also forged a deal with libraries in at least five states, which plan to install the extension on their own computers and educate members about how to use it at home. "Adding this service on computers used by our patrons continues the long tradition of librarians arming readers with more information about what they are reading," Sta-

cey Aldrich, the state librarian of Hawaii, said in a statement. "We're trying to be the opposite of an algorithm."



Brill and Crovitz launched NewsGuard in response to two dueling crises facing journalism: the declining trust in mainstream media, and the proliferation of fake news that masquerades as legitimate. To fend off the threat of heavy-handed regulation, tech companies have unleashed artificially intelligent tools, which in turn have sparked charges of censorship. Recent changes to Facebook's algorithm, for example, led to traffic declines at a range of media outlets. But Republican members of Congress have since seized on the shrinking reach of sites like The Gateway Pundit as evidence that Facebook censors conservatives. Brill and Crovitz view NewsGuard as a sort of compromise. "We see ourselves as the logical, classic, free market American way to solve the problem of unreliable journalism online," Brill says. "The alternatives out there are either government regulation, which most people should rightly hate, and the second-worst idea, which is: Let's let the platforms continue to say they're working on algorithms to deal with this, which will never work."



NewsGuard's staff of nearly 40 reporters and dozens of freelancers are still working their way through 4,500 websites that they say account for 98 percent of the content shared online. The creators say they're on track to meet that goal by October. Sites can score up to 100 points on the NewsGuard rubric, with certain offenses, like repeatedly publishing stories identified as false, carrying extra weight. Any site that receives less than 60 points gets marked as red. The NewsGuard staff calls all of these organizations to discuss their shortcomings, and to ensure that they've characterized the site fairly.

"Algorithms don't call for comment," Brill says, adding that dozens of sites that have already improved their scores by integrating NewsGuard's criteria. (Courtesy wired.com)

New Alief Neighborhood Center Represents Future Cultural Reality Of Area

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



The Alief Neighborhood Center combines three City of Houston departments (Library, Parks, & Health) to create a civic center at the heart of the redeveloped 37-acre urban park. Raised out of the floodplain, the building's elevated 'front porch' frames a space for the diverse community to come together, share ideas, and express an identity unique to Alief. The Center is a model for resilient design in a post-hurricane Harvey environment — a 'Lilly-pad' for those seeking shelter from the storm.

**BUILDING AWARDS-** Rethinking The Future Awards 2020 First Award | Public Building (Concept) The \$52 million, 63,000-square-foot multi-purpose facility at 11903 Bellaire will combine a health clinic, community center and library into one space. The structure, which will sit in 37-acre Alief Park, will consolidate the Hennington-Alief Regional Library at 7979 South Kirkwood and the park's existing community center, both of which are aging. It also will replace the area's Women, Infants and Children Center, which today leases space at 12660 Beechnut. City council passed one item appropriating \$4.8 million for contractor EYP Inc. to begin construction on the new center, and another item giving Manhattan Construction \$100,000 for construction management services.

The 70,000sf 2-story new building is elevated over a parking area providing convenient access to the building programs directly above. Health Department programs provided include W.I.C. (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), DAWN (Diabetes

Awareness Network) that provides support for a variety of chronic illnesses, and a Senior Center. The Parks Department programs include a full-size competition gymnasium with a perimeter elevated walking track above, a community fitness center and spaces to support youth after-school and summer programs.



The library, located on the second floor, and accessed through a grand 'stair-a-torium' in the lobby contains light-filled stack-space and reading

areas with expansive views both to the park to the south and to the existing grove of preserved trees on the north. Directly adjacent to the library, HPL's technology-rich TechLINK youth maker-doer program contains spaces for collaboration, the 'Tiny Techs' children's area, music recording studio, virtual reality stations, photo/video lab, and a maker space.

Site amenities include a competition soccer field, two full-size practice soccer fields, two futsal courts (fast-paced soccer played on a hard-surfaced smaller court) baseball field, skate park, tennis courts, children's playground, outdoor swimming pool facility, community gardens, a marketplace venue, and outdoor event space areas. The Alief Neighborhood Center is

scheduled to open in early 2022.

The Mission Of The Alief Neighborhood Center



To Foster A Culture Of Health



To Create A Heart For Civic Engagement



All In A Spirit Of Shared Collaboration



With The Biggest Front Porch In Texas!

Related

Community Resource Center Opens

Sponsored by the ITC Community Empowerment Organization with the collaboration of the SEONE Corporation, the Community Resource Center opens its door on Tuesday, April 6, 2021, at the Southern News Group building.

The mission of the Community Resource Center is to serve as a "one stop-shop" for the underserved minority population in the southwest area of Houston. The Center will provide members of the community with information that will empower them to improve their quality of life and to also serve as a way for participants to access the rich pool of resources avail-

able to them.



Southern News Group, Houston, Texas

Members of the community who have questions about any of the variety of issues the Center will address are encouraged to schedule interviews with the Center. The Center will link the person with a professional who can best address their needs.



The areas the Center will address include disaster assistance, loans and grants, small business development, tax information, immigration, legal issues, workforce, housing and renting, veterans issues, medical, healthcare service, education, skills development, children and child welfare and city services.

The Center's services will be led by senior educator, Dr. Tina Agosa and many other assistants.

