

Elon Musk accuses BBC of covering up vaccine side effects

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By Matthew Field



Elon Musk has accused the BBC of covering up the side effects of Covid vaccinations and spreading misinformation about masks.

The billionaire accused the broadcaster of double standards after a BBC journalist asked him about hate speech and fake news on Twitter during a combative interview.

Mr Musk said: “Does the BBC hold itself at all responsible for misinformation regarding masking and the side effects of vaccinations. And not reporting on that at all?”

“And what about the fact that the BBC was put under pressure by the British government to change editorial policy?”

The entrepreneur did not expand on his allegations, which were made during a surprise interview with a BBC reporter at Twitter's San Francisco offices.

I said BBC could come Twitter, then, to my surprise, a reporter shows up

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) April 12, 2023

Some of the BBC's early coverage of masks, in which experts questioned their effectiveness, now carry disclaimers about the original reporting.

One such story, published in March 2020, says the story was “based on the advice available... at the time”.

Last month, the Guardian reported that BBC editors had asked journalists to avoid using the word “lockdowns” early in the pandemic on the urging of Downing Street. The BBC insisted at the time its decisions were editorially independent.

The BBC declined to comment on Mr Musk's claims.



The broadcaster has previously reported several stories on serious, but very rare, side effects that can occur from coronavirus vaccines, based on scientific studies.

Mr Musk has spoken about having “major side effects” after getting his second booster jab, which left him feeling as if he was “dying for several days.”

During the BBC interview, Mr Musk also accused the journalist of lying after he claimed there had been an increase in hate speech on Twitter since its \$44bn takeover last year.

Mr Musk said: “I say sir that you don't know what you are talking about... because you cannot give me a single example of hateful content, not even one tweet.

“You claimed that hateful content is high. That is false, you just lied.”

BBC journalist James Clayton defended his line of questioning, citing an organisation that has warned about a rise in hateful posts on the site.

Groups such as the Anti-Defamation League and the Center for Countering Digital Hate have claimed there has been a surge in derogatory remarks against Black Americans since Mr Musk completed his takeover, while others have cited evidence of an increase in anti-LGBT abuse.

Since his takeover of the site, Mr Musk has revoked bans on hundreds of accounts previously barred for breaking Twitter's rules on hate speech or misinformation.

Mr Musk insisted hate speech impressions have fallen, saying: "People will say all sorts of nonsense."

Despite the altercation, the South African-born entrepreneur said he would bow to the BBC's demands and remove a Twitter label designating the corporation as "government funded media".

Mr Musk said he would alter the disclaimer to read "publicly funded". He added: "We want it to be as truthful and accurate as possible – we're adjusting the label.

"I know the BBC wasn't thrilled about being labelled state affiliated media."

The 51-year-old claimed the BBC was guilty of bias, but added it was "among the least biased" media groups.

In the wide ranging 20-minute interview, Mr Musk also said owning Twitter has been "extremely painful".

The company was being run "like a non-profit" and "spending money like it's going out of fashion" when he took charge last October, Mr Musk said.

The Tesla chief has been slashing jobs in an effort to bring down costs and Mr Musk admitted Twitter now had just 1,500 staff, down from 8,000 people when he took over the social network.

He addressed criticisms of his decision to strip the New York Times of its "blue tick" on the social network after the publisher refused to pay about \$1,000 per month for the verification badge.

"It's a small amount of money, so I don't know what their problem is... we're going to treat everyone equally."

He added he did not want Twitter to feature "some anointed class of journalists" compared to the public.

Mr Musk added: "I must confess to some delight from removing the verified badge from the New York Times. That was great."



Mr Musk has agreed to change the BBC's labelling to 'publicly funded' after backlash an earlier designation