The End of Social Media: An Interview With Jack Dorsey

jack dorsey on his exit from bluesky, how twitter lost its way, jack's strategy for ending censorship forever, new background on the elon saga, and the death of social media as we know it

Image credit: Getty

- **Taking Twitter private was the only way the much less censorious version of the platform would survive**
- **There's "absolutely no way" social media companies remain censorship resistant without moving to open protocols. "We need to change the foundation everything is built on"**
- **Jack's prediction for the price of Bitcoin in 2030**

There is perhaps no leader in technology more misunderstood than Jack Dorsey, the enigmatic founder and (twice) former CEO of Twitter, now X. Through Covid, and America's first real era of broad, highly-politicized social media thought policing, he became the face of censorship for large swaths of the country. But from his second appearance before Congress, where he made enemies of both the left and right in one of the more inspiring displays of disrespect for would-be tyrants I've ever seen, and in light of his committed, years-long focus on anti-authoritarian technologies, that simple story of free speech villainy never made sense.

Jack recently deleted his account on Bluesky, once pitched — by him — as social media's decentralized solution to censorship, and left the company's board. I reached out and asked him why, which is where our call began. In a rare, far-reaching interview, what follows is a missing chapter of internet history that sheds light not only on Bluesky, but Twitter, X, and the past five years of censorship and backlash. Because of vulnerabilities designed into the technology, social media, in its current, centralized form, can't survive the global war on speech. The future will be decentralized, or it won't be free.

-Solana

Mike Solana: You didn't just leave Bluesky's board, you deleted your profile. That feels pretty meaningful. Right off the bat, the most obvious question: why did you leave?

Jack Dorsey: Well, can we back up for some context for why we started it?

Yes, would love to.

We were doing something similar to what we did at Square at the time, which was fund a bunch of open source developers to work on the Bitcoin protocol, because it directly benefited everything Square was doing in terms of money movement.

I wanted to do something similar with Twitter, because it was the only way to get out of a lot of the issues we were seeing around the decisions we had to make on accounts, and the pressures we had as a public company based entirely on a brand advertising model. The only way to do it was to remove the protocol layer from Twitter and make it something we didn't control.

So what if we created a team that was independent to us, that built a protocol that Twitter could use, and then build on top of? Then we wouldn't have the same liabilities, because the protocol would be an open standard, like HTTP or SMTP. Twitter would become the interface, and we could build a valuable business by competing to be the best view on top of this massive corpus of conversation that's happening in real time.

So it took us about two years to interview people [who would build the protocol]. We actually looked at Nostr — I think the team even talked with fiatjaf [Nostr's creator] — early on, but for whatever reason decided to pass. I wasn't really privy to a lot of that conversation, or more likely, I wasn't paying enough attention.

We eventually landed on Jay [Graber]. She seemed great, and we decided to fund her. Around that time, I was also planning my exit [from Twitter], and Parag [Agarwal] was going to take over. And when Elon made the offer to buy the company, I think she had this general fear of — what do we do? Like, is there any way that the funding could be taken back? We gave them $14 million to work on the protocol.

At this point, did Twitter have a controlling share of the project?

No, [Twitter] had an advisory seat. But there was no informed structure.

It was, we're going to set this money aside, and whoever we hire can determine how best to build this protocol. In Square's case — Square Crypto, which became Spiral — Steve [Lee] decided he wanted to stay within the company, but he and his team would make all the decisions around what they work on.

In Jay's case, she decided she wanted to set up a completely different entity, a B Corp. That accelerated even more when Elon made the acquisition offer, and it very quickly turned into more of a survival thing, where she felt she needed to build a company, and build a model around it, get VCs into it, get a board, issue stock, and all these things. That was the first time I felt like, whoa, this isn't going in a direction I'm really happy with, or that wasn't the intention. This was supposed to be an open source protocol that Twitter could eventually utilize.

And then, as you know, Elon backed off [on the acquisition], and that disaster happened [laughs], until he finally bought it, which was the worst timeline ever. But throughout all that, it became more and more evident that Bluesky had a lot of great ideas. And they're ideas I believe in. I think the internet needs a decentralized protocol for social media. I think Elon needs it. I think X needs it. I think it removes liability for the company, to separate those layers.

But what happened is, people started seeing Bluesky as something to run to, away from Twitter. It's the thing that's not Twitter, and therefore it's great. And Bluesky saw this exodus of people from Twitter show up, and it was a very, very common crowd.

This tool was designed such that it had, you know, it was a base level protocol. It had a reference app on top. It was designed to be controlled by the people. I think the greatest idea — which we need — is an algorithm store, where you choose how you see all the conversations. But little by little, they started asking Jay and the team for moderation tools, and to kick people off. And unfortunately they followed through with it.

That was the second moment I thought, uh, nope. This is literally repeating all the mistakes we made as a company. This is not a protocol that's truly decentralized. It's another app. It's another app that's just kind of following in Twitter's footsteps, but for a different part of the population.

Everything we wanted around decentralization, everything we wanted in terms of an open source protocol, suddenly became a company with VCs and a board. That's not what I wanted, that's not what I intended to help create.

Around the same time, I found Nostr. We don't know who the leader is, it's like this anonymous Brazilian. It has no board, no company behind it, no funding. It's a truly open protocol. The development environment is moving fast. And I gave a bunch of money to them.

Day by day, I learned that this was actually the path. It emerged from something that was not Twitter-driven, it was a reaction to Twitter's failures, and I thought that was right as well. That's what I should help, and that's what I should support.

So I just decided to delete my account on Bluesky, and really focus on Nostr, and funding that to the best of my ability. I asked to get off the board as well, because I just don't think a protocol needs a board or wants a board. And if it has a board, that's not the thing that I wanted to help build or wanted to help fund.

At that point, was there any resistance to you leaving, or was there just agreement you wanted different things?

I think there was a general agreement that we wanted different things, and I think we had only met as a board once. It was super early on, so it wasn't a very active board. There wasn't a lot of attachment, at least from my perspective.

All that said, I really respect Jay. She was under a lot of pressure to survive and do the things that she did. But directionally, I just don't align with it. And I'd love to see more effort placed on open protocols akin to Nostr, which hits every single attribute that I was searching for when we originally kicked this idea off. If you go back to my thread, and Mike Masnick's *Protocols, Not Platforms* article, it hits every single one of those things, whereas Bluesky ultimately just went another direction.

Yeah, once I had access, Bluesky really just confused me. It didn't present as an underlying technology people, maybe even Twitter, would be building on top of. I mean it looked, felt, and functioned like just another version of Twitter.

It was the anti-Twitter. People were literally running from Twitter to Bluesky, and that is not a way to build something successful.

Of course, the architecture that you believe — and I agree — is kind of naturally vulnerable to censorship is still in place at X, and while Elon does appear committed to openness and freedom of speech, the great hope of decentralized technology is we don't have to trust anyone. So given that it hasn't changed, why are you back on Twitter?

Well, I never left. I just haven't been posting as much.

But you seemed to defend it, you described it as "freedom technology."

Well, I put that post on both Nostr and Twitter. And the reference of, "you're on one," it refers to different things based on where you read it.

Twitter is still a corporation. X is still a corporation. It has to make a conscious choice about the rights it grants to users, based on its policies. The fortunate thing is it's no longer a public company with a profit incentive based on an advertising model that can be wildly swayed by the whims of advertisers moving their budget elsewhere if they don't like what you're doing. So Elon made a choice, and I think it's the right choice. I think he bought it at the wrong time in the market, obviously, but the choice was, I'm just going to suffer that cost to maintain these policies that I want. And that means the advertisers have left, predominantly, and the business model is going to struggle.

You have to build up a lot more than advertising to make that model work. You have to build subscriptions, which Elon is doing. You have to build commerce. You have to base more of your model on these internet primitives that can monetize better than advertising if you're going to have policies like [Elon's].

It's provable now, because you can see the decline from where the business was. Twitter was a $5 billion a year business. I don't know what it is now, but it's obviously nowhere near that, right? These are choices that can be made, but it doesn't mean that it's going to be the same level of business for quite some time, until you figure out a completely different model around it.

You know, for many Americans — despite all of your work clearly to the contrary, in my opinion, despite Bluesky, despite Nostr, despite everything you've said publicly, and in your appearances before Congress — you're still the face of censorship, because you presided over Twitter during a truly censorious regime. Given your perspective here, how did that happen? Had you lost power at the company? Was it something with your board, or was it just the advertisers? Was there just no way to do anything else at Twitter at that time?

I think the core, critical sin was choosing the advertising model to begin with. Brand advertising is not like direct advertisement, which is more programmatic. It requires something like a Disney to essentially give you a favor, because the only players that matter to them are Google and Facebook. Snapchat, Twitter, everything else did not matter. And these are ads that are essentially throwaway for them. But we made that choice in order to go public.

We needed a model. Facebook's model was really good. So we came up with an ad program and ran with it. And I came back to the company a year after IPO, and we were seeing a decline in growth, and that manifested in a decline in ad revenue. So our first focus was to rework the product so we were growing again, and then second was to get off this dependency on advertisement.

And when you're entirely dependent on that, if a brand like P&G or Unilever doesn't like what's happening on the platform, and they threaten to pull the budget, which accounts for like 20% of your revenue? You have no choice, and... you have no choice. If you take a stance, and they pull the budget, and the stock market sees that, the stock price goes from like 70 bucks to 30. Then you have employees leave because they can get greater value elsewhere, and that's the whole conundrum that you're stuck in.

And you're at risk of a hostile takeover, right?

Yeah, and we had an activist come in, by the way. And he sat on our board for a year and a half. We didn't have dual-class voting shares, we had no defense whatsoever. So my only path out that I could see was: we have to be on a protocol that we can't remove content from. We have to move away from this dependency on brand advertisement. We were moving into commerce, direct response, and payments. You can see all those experiments were going on before the company was sold. And we must move to a position where our policies are actually matching the fact that from a technology standpoint, we can't take the same actions that we did in the past, pure and simple.

As a public company, that's very hard to do, because every move you make is scrutinized and it reflects in your stock price. So a big part of it was our model. A big part of it was the company was much bigger than it should have been. I was extremely challenged by my board. The board has always been a problem at that company, and I was happy to see it end. But there was only one way for it to end, which is going private. And I think that's the greatest act.

It seems like you set the wheels of the entire Elon saga in motion, starting with Elon joining the board. Was your sense that it would end up with Elon taking the company private?

I had tried to get Elon on the board for some time. He obviously loves Twitter, and I've always loved how he used it, because he used it in a very pure form. And he would be extremely expressive on it. So I tried to get him on the board twice before, but the board ultimately said no both times. Which also was one of the reasons I left, the second time that that happened.

When our activist came in, I offered to step down as CEO and the board wanted to go in a different direction. I didn't want to be on a board with an activist. I didn't want to run a company like that. It's just a Wall Street mess. It's not creative, it's diminishing. But the board said no. So at that point, I'm like, okay, I have to plan an exit. It's not going to be right now, but it has to be over the next two years, because I just don't want to live this way.

Elon was aware of the board [denying him a seat] for some time, but he came to his own conclusions about approaching the company and buying it. I don't know why he bought a significant share in the company, that led the board to ask him to join. But he did.

I did have conversations with him for some time, like, this company would be better off as a private company because making the changes it needs to make to live up to its potential, as a true internet company, and protocol and service and business on top, can't be done as a public company. You just can't do that work in public.

Had you taken it private, what would you have liked to do, both for the product and business? I know you're talking about the protocol, but I'm still wondering how that solves the business piece.

Oh, we'd create other revenue lines. We'd focus more on commerce. We'd focus more on payments. We'd focus on everything they're trying to do right now. All this we were doing before the company was sold. But I would do it faster, because as a private company, you can just shut down the advertising business, and only work on commerce. Only work on payments. Only work on small advertisements, more akin to classifieds, which I think is a phenomenal business for something like Twitter, where you have more direct response, but at a very, very localized level.

X has fewer than half the employees it used to, and it seems like product development has accelerated. What did you make of reducing the headcount? A lot more is being launched. Not all of it's perfect, but it does seem like more is happening.

Well, I think that's more true now than ever with all the AI tools we have, so the timing is correct. And just to keep in mind, it was a brand advertising business, and a brand advertising business needs a huge sales staff. Over 50 to 60% of Twitter employees were in sales. These are people talking to large brands all the time, and coming up with ideas which get built into the product. So there's a lot of say on the sales side of what ships and what doesn't, and the risk appetite we're willing to take.

Sales would have a say on product? Like features, other things on the platform?

Oh yeah. When I came in, a lot of it was being driven by sales and sales leaders.

Wow.

Again, it all goes down to incentives, right? What are the incentives? The incentives were profit and making numbers for the quarter. So they were doing all the right things for the situation they were in. But the problem was the situation they were in. Which was being a public company entirely dependent on this one business model.

Was Parag also determined to remove Twitter from that model?

Yeah, he was.

And that was sad to me. I really think Parag and Elon could have gotten along. He's an incredible engineer. It was really heartbreaking to see. He was on the path of everything we were doing. We were on the path to making sure we never had another permanent ban. That was the mandate that we gave the team. It was like, we're gonna remove that tool from you. How are you satisfying what you believe is right without that tool? And, you know, the protocol was a big part of that.

It's such a crazy thing — it seems like the core leadership team at Twitter, around you, was just totally opposed to elements throughout the company, from the sales team to the board. It's almost as if the company were fundamentally in conflict with itself.

Um, I think there was alignment. We were slow at things, that's definitely true. We definitely had too many people. And we went through two rounds of layoffs before the take-private. So yeah, I think there was alignment. It was just really slow to get there.

And it was also pretty reactive to what was happening in the world. I would even say overly reactive. All my tweets about the Donald Trump suspension — I said very clearly, this is right for Twitter, the business, but it was absolutely wrong for the world and the internet.

Keep in mind Mike, that's that time when, like, AWS removed Parler, and Apple took it off the app store, and it felt like this giant collusion to remove them. But [the Trump ban] was right for the business, because if we didn't act on it, we probably would have lost all our advertisers, which would affect the business and stock price. But it was wrong for the world and the internet, given the fact that we could do it in the first place. No one should be able to do that.

You said that before Congress, during your second appearance. You said something like "you shouldn't have this power, I shouldn't have this power, no one should have this power." You were thinking about Bluesky at that point, but it's sad because it just didn't happen the way that you'd hoped.

It is sad, but it created something different in contrast to Twitter, which is Nostr, and that is something I believe in. I know it's early, and Nostr is weird and hard to use, but if you truly believe in censorship resistance and free speech, you have to use the technologies that actually enable that, and defend your rights. I find it interesting to watch people who say they believe in these things, but aren't invested in learning about Bitcoin or something like Nostr. Because those are technologies no company or government can compromise in any way. But corporations can be compromised. And they have been.

According to the Twitter Files, at least what I saw, it looked like there were open lines of communication between people on your team and the government. Was the reaction to this overblown, in your opinion, or do you think the government relationship there was inherently problematic?

I think it was problematic, and I also don't think the people who got called out in the Twitter Files get enough credit for pushing back on government requests. The U.S. is certainly one of them. Twitter has a track record of fighting the U.S. on free speech causes, especially around transparency reports. Opening the lens even broader to other governments, we had even more fights. Tons of fights with India, Turkey, Russia, Nigeria. These are all governments that threatened arrest of our employees, raided our employees' homes, offices, asking for phone numbers and personal information for accounts that were critical of the governments. I think that was one part that's overlooked and not appreciated.

The other part is, with the Twitter Files, I wanted Twitter to be the most transparent company in the world, and I would have appreciated if… like, just release all the emails to the public. Just release all the information, instead of getting this little lens through these very specific people. All of whom I respect a lot. But there's a lot of context that is missing when you only look through this particular lens. And these are journalists, again, I respect. I have a lot of respect for Matt [Taibbi]. But if you really want to live up to that transparency, just let the people decide. Of course, you'll have people like Matt who can query this, and write a story in their way, and that will be meaningful. But to be able to see the full context, and everything that's happening, is also important and useful.

How did Twitter survive, with pressure from foreign governments like that? You managed to avoid country-wide bans for the most part, right?

Yeah. Elon has taken a different tack. Our principle was around free speech on the internet as a general rule, and that we would fight governments on that. His is free speech as determined by local law, and that means if India says you have to take these accounts down, you have to take those accounts down, because they're against the law.

I think both approaches are reasonable. One is very hard because you're fighting governments all the time, and the other one forces you into a lot of sticky situations where you have to be more transparent that the government is asking you to take this down, and we can't say why. And maybe, you have more public campaigns against the government, and the people electing different choices there.

I find it fascinating to watch how these things play out. Again, I think it points to the need for a protocol where you don't have to make these decisions at all, right? Because you don't control the protocol. There's no one single point of failure you can chokehold and bring before Congress and yell at. It's like Bitcoin, it doesn’t have one leader or one central chokehold element. And I think that's critical for what it’s intended to do.

Yeah, you'd get to a point where the only way foreign governments could actually pursue such draconian policies would be by removing access to the internet.

Yes. Our path was, India would say, "We're going to turn Twitter off." And they have a history of doing stuff like this. They did it with TikTok. And the other path — Elon's current path — you just have to take the accounts down.

There is a middle of the road, which I think X still does, which is a per-country takedown. You can take the content down within the country, but it's still available to the rest of the world. But if someone in that country has a VPN, they can still see it. And I think governments are wise to this now, so today they're asking to take content down in every single market. Again, you're the central point of decision and failure, ultimately, because you've given an entity the ability to make requests of you. Whether that be an advertiser or a government, it's ultimately the same thing.

But that per-country takedown functionality started way back in 2009. There's a blog post on it called "The Tweets Must Flow." That functionality still exists today, and I think it's still being used. But what you saw with Australia recently, is the prime minister asked Twitter and Elon to take some content down everywhere, instead of just within the Australian market. I think you'll see more and more of that stuff.

That really is crazy, because what is the difference at that point between, say, the Australian government demanding Twitter take down some Australian account globally, and the Australian government demanding Twitter take down some other account, from somewhere else in the world, critical of the Australian government? An American, for example? And then, in either case, a foreign government will be determining what we can see in America.

Exactly. You have a surface area where they can attack, and they're going to attack it. They're going to use it. Or they're going to manipulate it. That's why you just gotta play a different game. And that's why the protocol is for me.

Bluesky wasn't going to be the protocol layer, in my view. It put too much emphasis on the app. And Twitter still has this problem. It has a centralized surface area. We need different options if we truly believe in censorship resistance. We need to change the foundation everything is built on.

It sounds like your belief is, over time, due to this attack area there's almost no way all of these companies don't get taken down by the global effort to control speech?

Correct. Absolutely. There's absolutely no way. You'll have phases, but that doesn't exist forever. Elon will fight in the way he fights, and I appreciate that, but he could certainly be compromised. Or something could happen to him, and then what happens to the whole platform? There are no guarantees because you're not building on top of a technology that guarantees the right. It has to *guarantee* the right, it can't just be granted to you.

From X to Nostr, maybe even Facebook to a degree, it seems we have a much freer social media landscape this election year than we had during the last election. Could that tip the outcome one direction or another?

I don't know. I think... you know, all of these are new tools, right? And we're still kind of getting used to what the internet enables. I think it's less of a question about how free is the speech on these platforms, or how free is the policy, but more like, how will all these AI models and LLMs — and people using them to manipulate — impact the election? That seems like the unpredictable variable here, and that's the one I would probably pay more attention to. I don't think [AI] is necessarily a bad thing. But it's a much bigger unknown than loosening policies around speech, to me.

On deepfakes, do you think that it's as concerning as people make it out to be? How would you handle it if you were still running a content platform?

I hate to sound like a broken record, but one of the beauties of Nostr is you have these public-private key pairs, so it confirms identity. I think a confirmed identity that you own, that is not given to you by a government or corporation, that you truly own, is the way through this, because you can verify authenticity.

No one knows my secret key on Nostr. They know my public key, we know the math equations to match the two, but I can digitally sign my messages so people can know that these things are coming from me.

Now, videos created by third parties are another thing, another problem space I don't have an answer to, but I think it has to start with your own identity, and who owns your identity. Right now, all the companies own our identities. To me, that's super scary because again, can they be compromised? Can a government hold them to account? And the answer is absolutely yes, and you're seeing how that has played out over the years, and certainly in the present, and that will continue into the future.

We've talked a lot about deleting people, but the idea of a government actually just… taking a person over is really crazy. If you could essentially seize an individual's identity, and use it to manipulate the public, or for whatever? That's just —

Yep, it's crazy. That's crazy.

My last two questions are short and not as serious. First, why did you unfollow so many people on X?

I've always wanted to do that. I've always wanted to start fresh, because I believe the algorithm can be good enough that you don't really need the follow action. I think the follow action eventually goes away, and the algorithm is just based on your behavior, and it just becomes signal.

After I unfollowed everyone, I'm seeing the exact same content I saw before. Like, I see all your posts, I see all the people I used to follow. It's all there, and in fact it's a little bit better right now — what I'm clicking on and engaging with at the moment is a much stronger signal than my follow graph, and I think the algorithm is taking note of that, and my feed feels much more attuned to me.

I'm impressed with the iterations of the algorithm that they're doing. I think it's generally really good work. My only ask is to open it up even more and let people choose what algorithm they want to use, even write their own algorithms to filter all the conversations. To me, that would give users ultimate agency, and ultimate freedom. Because this whole 'freedom of speech, not reach,' is yet another tool of censorship in the end, because the algorithm is determining reach. If you truly believe in the freedom of speech, you gotta go to the heart of where it's now being decided. And that's not the policy, it's the actual algorithm itself.

Awesome, last question. What will be the price of Bitcoin in 2030?

[Laughs] I don't know. Over... at least a million. I do think it hits that number and goes beyond. But I think the price is only interesting... The most amazing thing about Bitcoin, apart from the founding story, is anyone who works on it, or gets paid in it, or buys it for themselves — everyone who puts any effort in to make it better — is making the entire ecosystem better, which makes the price go up. It's a fascinating ecosystem and movement, more than anything else. It taught me a lot.