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This Week's Stories

Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey Still Won't Ban Donald Trump Over His Tweets

May 12, 2017

US president Donald Trump is one of the first global leaders to make daily headlines through Twitter. After he controversially fired FBI director James Comey, Trump took to Twitter to defend his decision and goad his opposition.

Then there were his aggressive tweets about North Korea, which resulted in the restrictive regime threatening war last month.

Some people think Trump should stop tweeting, others said Twitter should proactively ban him from its platform, because they think he's so dangerous.

It isn't happening any time soon, according to Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey.

He told NBC's Sunday Today show: "I believe it's really important to hear directly from our leadership, I believe it's really important to hold them accountable and I believe it's really important to have conversations out in the open rather than have them behind closed doors."

He added: "If we were all to suddenly take these platforms away, where does it go? What happens? It goes in the dark, and I just don't think that's good for anyone."

This isn't the first time Dorsey has defended the decision not to ban Trump from Twitter.

Last month he told Backchannel that he didn't know of a better way to hold global leaders accountable — where else can politicians see immediate feedback from voters?

One of the reasons people give for banning Trump is because his tweets encourage his hardcore supporters to harass people — for example, by describing journalists and news outlets as "fake news."

A study from the Anti-Defamation League late last year found Jewish people and journalists were getting more harassment on Twitter after Trump's election.

But Dorsey is holding fast to the policy that Trump's tweets are newsworthy, something Twitter's policy team takes into account.

"[We're] not taking something down that people should be able to report on and actually show that this is what the source said," he said in February.

"It's really important to make sure that we provide that source for the right reporting, and to minimize bias in articles."

businessinsider.com

Snap's \$2.2 Billion Loss Caps Bumpy First Months As A Public Company

May 10, 2017

"In March, Snap said its financial performance would depend more on its "ability to elevate user engagement" if the number of users did not grow significantly."

For Snap, the challenge is tricky because the company approaches social networking differently. Instead of emphasizing the number of people users know, Snapchat focuses on fewer connections and the quality of friends on the network. Yet with Wall Street and others using Facebook as a benchmark, the comparisons for Snap are tough. For now, Snap looks more like Twitter, the social media service that has had rough times because of anemic user growth.

Snap's weak results so soon after its I.P.O. appeared to shock many — even though it had warned investors that owning Snap stock would not be an easy path to riches. In its I.P.O. filing, Snap had highlighted slowing growth and huge losses that were not expected to end. Snap's executives had cautioned that results would be "lumpy and unpredictable."

Evan Spiegel, Snap's chief executive, had said, "One of the challenges we've encountered over time is explaining to people why bigger isn't better."

But the excitement over a social media entity with young founders (Mr. Spiegel is 26; his co-founder, Bobby Murphy, is 28), an even younger user base and quirky digital advertising products had drowned out those warnings.

"They told us all of this," Brian Wieser, an analyst at Pivotal Research, said of Snap's executives. "With Snap in particular, there's always been a greater fool element — a lot of people bought it because they thought someone else would pay more for it. That's impossible to ignore."

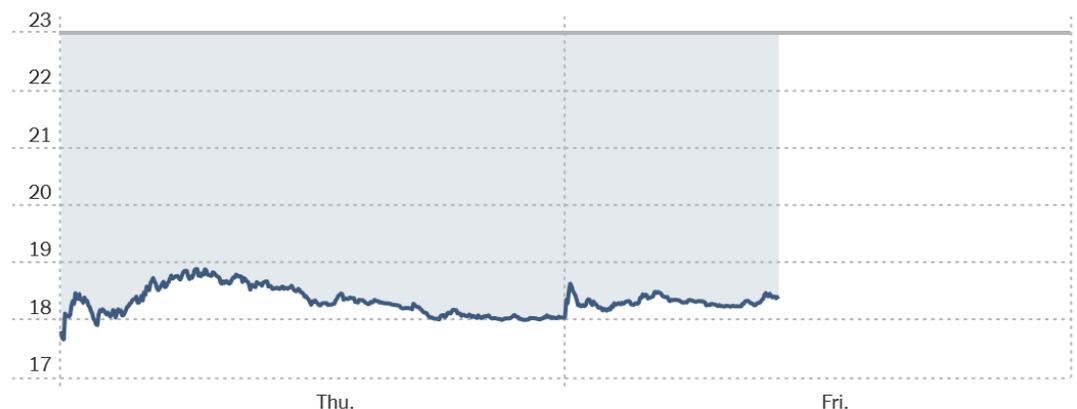
Snap's \$2.2 billion loss for the first quarter, which included a \$2 billion expense related to stock compensation, was far above its \$104 million loss a year ago. Revenue was \$149.6 million, almost four times as much as a year ago, but fell short of Wall Street estimates of \$158.6 million.

And while Snap said its number of daily users had increased to 166 million in the first quarter, up 36 percent from a year ago, that was down from 53 percent growth in the first quarter of 2016.

Snap Inc

12:14 PM ET 05/12/2017

\$18.42 -\$4.57 -19.87%



Source: Reuters

The New York Times

Snap's shares plunged in after-hours trading to about \$17.27, just above the company's I.P.O. price of \$17 a share.

Snap emphasized on a call with analysts on Wednesday that people were spending more time than ever on Snapchat, more than 30 minutes a day, seeking to convince investors that loyalty to its products matters more than the size of its user base.

“We still have a lot of work to do, but I’m excited by the amount of progress we’ve made in such a short time,” Mr. Spiegel said. He added that people were highly engaged with Snapchat, with users creating on average more than three billion snaps, or short pieces of content, every day, up from 2.5 billion the previous quarter.

Ali Mogharabi, an analyst at Morningstar Research, said Snap’s argument was that “if users are spending more time in the app, no matter the growth rate, that by itself could attract advertisers.” Still, he said, “at this early stage, growth in both user time spent on the platform and in the number of users are both very important.”

Snap’s results were also viewed as a referendum on whether it would be able to fend off Facebook, which wanted to buy Snap in 2013 and is trying to crush the young company. For years, Snap — which is based in Venice, Calif., outside the orbit of Silicon Valley companies — had turned certain social media norms on its head by pioneering features like disappearing messages and add-ons like lenses and filters.

In the last year, Facebook has copied some of Snapchat’s features and inserted them into its apps, including Instagram and the messaging app WhatsApp.

Given Facebook’s immense size, the moves have created concern that Snapchat will not seem sufficiently different and attractive to users.

When asked during the call on Wednesday about whether he was worried about Facebook, Mr. Spiegel said innovative companies needed to “basically enjoy the fact that people are going to copy your products if you make great stuff.”

The issue of slowing user growth has been evident for Snap for some time. The company’s average number of daily users grew by 48 percent in the fourth quarter of 2016, by 63 percent in the third quarter and by 66 percent in the second quarter, Snap said in its public offering filing.

In March, Snap said its financial performance would depend more on its “ability to elevate user engagement” if the number of users did not grow significantly. The company generates most of its revenue by selling space to advertisers who want to reach a young audience that spends a lot of time looking at images and stories in the app.

Snap is also spending handsomely to create products to engage users. It spent \$805.8 million on research and development in the first quarter, 28 times higher than a year ago. Marketing costs skyrocketed to \$219.7 million, from \$14.7 million a year ago.

Snapchat still has an ace: Its users are demographically attractive. Many are between 18 and 34, a group that is particularly alluring to advertisers, said Sean Corcoran, executive director for the Americas at MullenLowe Mediahub, a digital advertising firm.

“It’s close to 80 million people, spanning high school to young moms and dads, and they are incredibly hard to reach because their media habits are fragmented,” Mr. Corcoran said.

“Snapchat is one of the few places you can get to them in a mass way.”

nytimes.com

Mother's Day 2017 Tech Gift Guide

May 10, 2017

With spring in bloom and Memorial Day around the corner, it can only mean one thing: It's time again to celebrate moms. This Sunday, May 14, is Mother's Day. And those of us who are slow in getting mom gifts are now scrambling to come up with ideas. Giving gadgets or other tech-related products as gifts may be a great way to show mom just how much you care.

However, deciding exactly what to give at a reasonable price isn't always easy. So Fortune has compiled the list of tech gifts for mothers who would welcome more technology in their lives.

Sometimes, waiting a little longer to buy a gift can be a good idea. Amazon on Tuesday announced a new smart home hub called the Amazon Echo Show, which allows users to control their smart homes and other apps with their voices. And along with it, the company announced that it's cut the price on its older smart home hub, the Amazon Echo, to \$150, a \$30 savings from its previous price. That's a good value for a device that's still considered one of the best smart home hubs available.

Looking for a deal for an active mother? Amazon is selling Plantronics BackBeat FIT Wireless Bluetooth Headphones for \$100, a \$30 savings on their regular retail price. The headphones connect to devices wirelessly, allowing moms to listen to tunes all day.

Amazon is also selling an array of Fitbit activity trackers at a discount for Mother's Day. The Fitbit Charge 2 is available for \$130, down from its regular retail price of \$150. The Fitbit Blaze is going for \$150 on Amazon, giving customers the opportunity to save \$50 from its regular retail price.

Looking for a smartwatch for mom? The Fossil Q Wander Gen 2, which regularly costs \$255, is now on sale at Amazon for \$191. The smartwatch is a nice alternative to Apple Watch, the leading smartwatch on the market.

People looking for a cheaper gift for mom should consider products from Bluetooth-tracking company Tile. The company sells a wide range of products that attach to keys, laptops, and other devices, and use wireless technology to tell users where they are so they don't get lost. The Tile Slim, regularly priced at \$30, is now available for \$24.

To safeguard mom's iPhone 7, Otterbox sells a number of different phone cases. One of those cases, called the Otterbox Symmetry Series Case, which typically costs \$50, is available at Amazon for \$20. At an affordable price and with features that will safeguard the iPhone from a dangerous fall, it's a great value.

People who don't mind spending a few extra bucks on mom can pick up an Amazon Fire HDX tablet. The Fire HDX 8.9, which runs on Android and comes with a host of apps, starts at \$430 for Mother's Day, a \$100 savings from its usual price.

Famed fashion line Kate Spade is getting into the Mother's Day sales with Perforated Sleeve, a protective case for the 13-inch Apple MacBook. It's available at Amazon for \$60, a \$10 savings.

For mothers who love music, Amazon is selling audio company Bang & Olufsen's A1 portable Bluetooth speaker for \$226, a \$24 savings. The speaker also comes with a microphone for speakerphone support, allowing moms to make calls.

Did you know Amazon is now selling fresh-cut flowers, including roses, tulips, and daisies? Mom might love a nice bouquet—even if it isn't a nice tech gift.

fortune.com

Products & Services

Google Allo Chat App Crafts Customer Emoji Using Your Selfies

May 10, 2017

Google's Allo chat program is still missing some basic features, but hey, you're a fan of Bitmoji right? That's the line of thinking for the app's latest add-on: personalized emojis, made from your face. Unlike Snapchat's Bitmoji, though, Google's version relies on computer vision and neural networks to craft a likeness from your selfies. Yup, algorithms are being tapped to draw your face.

In a blog post, Allo's expressions creative director Jennifer Daniel writes that while humans use context clues to suss out a things like a person's eye color in a variety of lighting conditions, computers can't quite do that. So her team turned to neural networks for help in that matter.

"We discovered that a few neurons among the millions in these networks were good at focusing on things they weren't explicitly trained to look at that seemed useful for creating personalized stickers," Daniels writes.

From there a team of humans was tasked with rating the output of the neural networks. According to Fast Company, there are around 563 million possible permutations. To deal with the issue of the uncanny valley, Google sidestepped off-putting caricatures by going for stickers/emoji versus an exact replication of a face. Sort of like the way a caricature artist at the boardwalk or county fair might.

"Pursuing a lower-resolution model, like emojis and stickers, allows the team to explore expressive representation by returning an image that is less about reproducing reality and more about breaking the rules of representation," according to Daniels.

How does it fare? If today's "sarcastic" style pack from Steven Universe designer Lamar Abrams and the samples we've seen are any indication, pretty well. Should you be an Allo user on Android, Daniels' blog post says the feature has begun rolling out today. Folks using the app on iOS will have to wait a bit longer, however.

engadget.com

Microsoft Announces Its Own Motion Controllers For Mixed Reality

May 10, 2017

Microsoft doubled down on its commitment to what it called "mixed reality" today at its Build developer conference, revealing motion controllers that work closely with VR headsets from Acer. With a \$399 bundle containing all you need coming later this year, it could be one of the more affordable ways out there to get into the VR game.

We've seen Acer's headset before — it was notable at the time that it used built-in cameras to both track objects and its own position in a room, HoloLens-style. That capability also powers the controllers — it's called "inside-out," by the way, as opposed to "outside-in," which uses sensors in the room to track the device and headset.

"These motion controllers were perfectly designed to work with our mixed reality headsets," said Microsoft's Alex Kipman on stage at the conference. "If you can see your hands, we're tracking them."

"Microsoft claims you'll get sub-millimeter precision without complex setups like IR blasters or in-room cameras — it's all in the headset and the controllers themselves."

That is to say, as long as your hands are in the field of view of the headset, they're being tracked optically by the cameras on the front. The controllers themselves have rings of LEDs that provide six degrees of freedom; there's also a trigger, thumbstick, and a tiny trackpad a la the Steam controller. They look a bit like the Oculus Touch controllers, but the "hoop" doesn't loop around your hand.

Microsoft claims you'll get sub-millimeter precision without complex setups like IR blasters or in-room cameras — it's all in the headset and the controllers themselves.

Microsoft didn't demo the controllers on stage, at least in reality — they did, however, have someone join a mixed reality conference between several Cirque du Soleil designers. It was a little corny, but it at least showed that somewhere, someone has working prototypes at least in their hands.

Developers have two headsets to choose from — a \$300 Acer one and a \$329 HP one, both of which you can order today. But if you're smart, you'll wait a little bit for the bundle coming this holiday season that includes a pair of controllers for \$399 all day. That makes it cheaper than either Oculus or Vive — especially so with the latter.

Whether the headset and tracking are up to those standards, however, is another question. Hands-on experiences with the headsets have produced mixed impressions, and the controllers aren't available for testing just yet. So while we can be happy that there's an easy, relatively inexpensive way to jump into VR on Windows, it might be best to withhold judgment.

techcrunch.com

Emerging Technology

Apple TV Set To Get Amazon Prime Video App This Summer

May 11, 2017

After a long-standing rivalry between the two companies, it appears they've reached an agreement. It appears Apple and Amazon have called a truce.

After years of neck and neck rivalry over video, the Amazon Prime video app will be coming to Apple TV, according to a BuzzFeed report. Apple will break the news at its Worldwide Developers Conference in June, the report says, with the app ready for users as soon as this summer. So the rumors you might've heard last week may indeed be true.

For Amazon Prime members, the one glaring strike against Apple TV has been its inability to stream Amazon video content. Apple's iOS mobile devices have long supported a stripped-down version of Amazon's video app that doesn't allow purchases. But the app, in any form, has never been available for Apple TV.

Competing set-top boxes from Roku, meanwhile, support all the major streaming apps and allow for movie rentals and purchases directly through those apps.

At the heart of the conflict is the fact that Amazon Video and Apple iTunes are rival services. In 2015, Amazon stopped selling Apple TV and Google Chromecast boxes because Amazon didn't want its customers returning boxes after they discovered Prime Video streaming wasn't supported.

As part of the agreement between the two companies, Amazon will reportedly begin selling Apple's set-top box again, according to BuzzFeed. Neither Apple nor Amazon responded to a request for com

cnet.com

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"For Amazon Prime members, the one glaring strike against Apple TV has been its inability to stream Amazon video content."

Microsoft Graph Bridges The Gap Between Windows And Your Phone

May 11, 2017

Microsoft's push into being the connective glue between all of your devices is encompassed in Graph. That is what the company is calling a handful of features it says will "connect dots between people, conversations, projects and content." Announced during the second day of Build 2017, the aim is to make all things Microsoft work seamlessly, whether you're on an iPhone, an Android device or a Windows PC. (And without mentioning Continuum.) It goes beyond that, tapping into Microsoft's cloud storage services in a bid to make you more efficient while switching across different hardware and keeping track of (almost) everything you do on your PC. Let's take a look.

Timeline is possibly the most intriguing feature, offering a (literal) timeline of what you were working on slash doing on your PC months or even years ago. This will encompass files, apps and even websites: Microsoft says it'll be as if you never left them. Will it offer older unedited files? Will this visual timeline only begin from the day you start using the latest version of Windows? We expect to hear more from Microsoft on this.

Cortana is, predictably, a prime part of that whole seamless digital experience. Microsoft explains you'll soon be able to log off of your PC and have the document you were previously poring over pop up on your smartphone -- who needs a coffee break, right? Cortana will ask if you want to pick up where you left off, whether it's a document, website or app. It brings the promises of Continuum to phones that aren't running mobile iterations of Windows. This is a good thing.

Clipboard is also picking up a cloud-powered upgrade, with the option to copy from and paste to any of your connected devices. At the moment, they have to be Windows machines or popular smartphones, and we know that for mobile devices, you'll need to have SwiftKey installed as a keyboard to offer up the pasting shortcuts. It'll be able to beam photos, links, entire paragraphs and even GIFs (less important) across your various devices.

The final part of the Graph pitch is Microsoft's cloud storage service, OneDrive. Now with Files on Demand, users will be able to access and use all of their cloud files without having them take up precious storage space on their device. They'll be displayed in File Explorer, and users will still be able to lock them to work offline when they need to work without an internet connection. All these features will roll out with the Fall Creators Update later this year. Naturally, they will also arrive decked in the company's new Fluent Design, ready for mixed reality headsets in 2020.

engadget.com

Mergers and Acquisitions

Verizon Bags Straight Path, Looks For Early 5G Lead

May 12, 2017

Verizon has agreed to acquire Straight Path Communications in a \$3.1 billion all-stock transaction, outbidding rival AT&T which made a \$1.6 billion offer for the company last month. Verizon expects the deal to close within nine months, pending FCC approval.

The acquisition will give the wireless behemoth a significant nationwide portfolio of millimeter-wave spectrum, which is viewed as important for the deployment of the next generation of wireless services.

In this article, we take a look at the rationale for Verizon's purchase and where it stands in the race to deploy 5G.

We have a price estimate of \$53 for Verizon's stock, which is about 15% ahead of the current market price.

Where U.S. Carriers Stand In Terms Of 5G

5G is a proposed telecom standard that will succeed the current 4G standards, providing wireless Internet speeds that could be as much as 40 time faster.

The technology is still in its early stages, and global standards are only in the process of being finalized. Moreover, the applications and use cases that could leverage such high data speeds still remain somewhat unclear.

The business model and overall financial viability of building out dense 5G networks also still need to be worked out by carriers. However, all the major U.S. carriers have been making plans to deploy 5G in some form, and Verizon was the first player to take a serious step.

While the company has been field testing the technology for about a year now, it indicated that it would begin customer trials in five U.S. cities beginning in Q2, with pilots in 11 markets expected by mid-2017.

Making Verizon's Spectrum Portfolio 5G Ready

Millimeter-wave wireless spectrum is seen as crucial to the deployment of 5G services. This spectrum has higher frequencies, allowing it to carry large amounts of data over short distances, unlike lower frequency spectrum which supports lower data rates and wider coverage.

Straight Path holds a sizable amount of spectrum in the 28 GHz and 39 GHz millimeter-wave bands – which have been approved by the FCC to carry 5G wireless services.

With the acquisition, Verizon is estimated to hold about 236 and 180 billion Mhz-POP in the 28 GHz and 39 GHz bands, respectively. In comparison, AT&T is estimated to hold just about 40 and 8 billion Mhz-POP, respectively, in the two bands, after factoring in its acquisition of FiberTower.

Verizon's Recent 5G And Broadband Focused Deals

The weaker propagation characteristics of high-band spectrum call for denser infrastructure on the part of telecom companies, with a larger number of small cells and greater levels of frequency reuse, and the small cells will require carriers to have strong fiber optic networks to provide back-end connectivity to these cells.

Verizon has been carrying out a series of deals to support its overall broadband and 5G deployment. In February this year, the carrier spent roughly \$1.8 billion to acquire XO Communications, which has a vast fiber optic network across the U.S.

The carrier also entered into three-year deal to buy at least \$1.05 billion worth of optical fiber from Corning. Verizon also recently signed a \$300 million contract with the Prysmian Group for fiber-optic cable.

forbes.com

NFL, Twitter Announce Partnership To Deliver Live Programming

May 11, 2017

"The NFL will produce a 30-minute live digital show that will air on Twitter five days per week during the NFL season."

The National Football League and Twitter today announced a new multiyear deal to deliver uniquely packaged official NFL video and other types of content to fans around the world daily, year-round. The NFL and Twitter, who have collaborated since 2013 through the Amplify program, will offer brands the opportunity to advertise on official NFL content created specifically for the Twitter platform. The deal breaks new ground in creative live programming and video-on-demand content. Live Show

The NFL will produce a 30-minute live digital show that will air on Twitter five days per week during the NFL season. The program will be hosted by top NFL Network talent and will cover breaking news, game highlights, key storylines, fantasy projections, team power rankings, pre-game updates, and more.

Live Pre-Game Coverage

The NFL will utilize Periscope and Twitter to bring fans unique live pre-game access from each of its primetime game windows, as well as other key match-ups during the season. From player warm-ups to sideline interviews, the NFL live broadcasts will give fans the ultimate behind-the-scenes experience on game days.

Video Clips

The NFL will continue to program a full slate of highlights, breaking news and analysis, and fan favorites like "Throwback Thursday" (#TBT) to keep its fans in-the-know on everything NFL. From gameday to historical content, Twitter is the place for NFL fans.

"Twitter continues to be an important partner in accessing millions of highly engaged fans on digital media," said Brian Rolapp, chief media and business officer for the NFL. "We have every expectation that the new daily live show, produced by NFL Network and featuring some of our top analysts, will quickly become some of the most popular programming on Twitter."

"We are very excited to offer football fans around the world even more content on Twitter from the NFL," said Twitter COO Anthony Noto. "This new multiyear collaboration will bring compelling live studio programs that discuss what's happening in the NFL, unique behind the scenes live broadcasts before games, and the best NFL highlights to Twitter, alongside the real-time NFL conversation."

nfl.com

Industry Reports

The Phones Take Over: Wireless Devices In The U.S. Now Outnumber Americans, Says Industry Report

May 11, 2017

There are now more smartphones, laptops and wireless-enabled tablets than people in the U.S. The devices now number 359.9 million, or 1.2 for every U.S. resident according to CTIA, a national trade group that tracks and represents the U.S. wireless communications industry.

The connected population are also data hogs. The organization also reports that Americans used 13.72 trillion megabytes of data in 2016. This is the equivalent of 1.58 million years of streaming videos, and 35 times the amount the nation used only five years ago. It is a healthy industry, however. Annual revenues from the wireless services and equipment alone now top \$236 billion, the organization reports.

"Americans are using more wireless data than ever. As wireless becomes central to our lives and the U.S. economy, it's no surprise that Americans' mobile data usage continues to skyrocket," said Meredith Attwell Baker, president and CEO of the group, which now is calling for better infrastructure and "next generation" 5G networks to cope with the demand.

The annual report arrives at a time when some sociologists, psychologists and safety experts are wondering if Americans are now too close to their devices. In the last year, several studies have reported that smartphone "addiction" is now a factor. Heavy cellphone use can lead to depression and anxiety, say some studies, while loss of the device itself can be considered authentically "traumatic."

Behavioral specialists are recommending that people reconnect via designated device-free times at home or in the work place. One Texas day care center even posted a sign to parents begging them to put down their phone and pay attention to their children at the end of the day.

Wireless devices and sophisticated technology also play a role in distracted driving.

"New technology in vehicles is causing us to become more distracted behind the wheel than ever before. Fifty-three percent of drivers believe if manufacturers put 'infotainment' dashboards and hands-free technology in vehicles, they must be safe," the National Safety Council advises.

"Make no mistake: This multitasking technology is about convenience, not safety," the nonprofit group says.

washingtontimes.com

Apple Tops \$800 Billion Market Cap For First Time

May 9, 2017

Apple Inc became the first U.S. company to top the \$800 billion mark in market capitalization on Tuesday, slightly more than two years after it crossed the \$700 billion threshold.

The iPhone maker's shares have gained 33 percent this year and almost 50 percent since the U.S. election in November. The company represents about 4 percent of the \$21.7 trillion that makes up the entire S&P 500 index.

Apple accounted for as much as 4.9 percent of the S&P 500 in September 2012 but is a smaller percentage now as the index as a whole has rallied more than 7 percent this year.

"It's just reflective of how powerful a franchise it is. It may be the most powerful franchise in the country today," said Rick Meckler, president of LibertyView Capital Management in Jersey City, New Jersey, whose firm does not own the stock.

"Considering that it has a limited number of products, it has really dominated that market in a way that few companies have, and it's been able to retain margins despite lots of competitors."

If Apple continues on its growth path, the company will top the \$1 trillion market cap level later this year.

"The iPhone maker's shares have gained 33 percent this year and almost 50 percent since the U.S. election in November."

Stock buybacks have also bolstered Apple shares, with the company reducing its actual share count by 20.9 percent and the average diluted shares outstanding by 20.5 percent over the past four years, according to Standard & Poor's data.

The median price target on Apple is \$160, up from the \$140 median three months ago. Shares closed at \$153.99 on Tuesday.

The closing market cap of \$802.8 billion was larger than the economies of 45 of the 50 U.S. states, topped only by Illinois, Florida, New York, Texas and California.

Billionaire Warren Buffett, whose Berkshire Hathaway has disclosed a stake of roughly \$20 billion in Apple, said on Monday he had grown more fond of the company because he could "very easily determine" the iPhone maker's competitive position "and who is trying to chase them."

Renters and younger adults are more likely to have just a cellphone, which researchers attribute to their mobility and comfort with newer technologies.

reuters.com



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