

Elon Musk: A Genius Pioneer or a Capitalist Thief?

by Ege Gazitepe

The name Elon Musk is now known throughout the world as the leading figure in space travel and electric cars. He became the richest person this year and as of now the title often changes between him and Jeff Bezos with no clear winner. Alongside his popularity, fame, and fortune, the names of his two companies in these fields -which are SpaceX and Tesla respectively- have become almost synonymous with the names of the scientific fields themselves. This immense and almost sudden rise of him and his companies has made him be received as a genius pioneer by a large group of people. But also, as expected, many others are sceptical against Elon Musk. This scepticism does not rise from the proportion of his fortune or the past successes of his companies, but rather stems from the supposed fakeness of his persona. This persona whether real or not can quite easily be seen, as Musk has a pretty active social media presence and he loves to be a guest in talk-shows or podcasts. In most of these occurrences, he tries to give a down-to-earth impression as he wants to separate himself from other billionaires with his pop culture knowledge and nerdiness. He wants people to believe he is just a witty hard-working nerd who paved his way through success with his own hands and nails instead of being portrayed as a shrewd businessman which is how most of the billionaires are always seen as. Some people genuinely believe in this persona but as mentioned some people label him as a capitalist thief who hides behind this mask only to increase his influence on society for personal profit. Most frankly, the truth lies in a combination of these arguments because as by themselves, they just manage to cover a portion of the greyness of Elon Musk's character. [\(1\)](#)

Firstly, let us dissect the reasoning behind Elon Musk's consideration as a genius pioneer. The dissection will show the truths and falsehoods behind this positive appearance he acquired. So, is Elon Musk a genius pioneer? Truthfully, Musk took a great deal of risk when he jumped into the electric vehicle and rocket sectors and risks are a major point of pioneering. The electric vehicle industry by itself was seen as a dead-end industry at the time. On the other hand, the rocket industry and especially its launching aspect, was mostly governmental at the time of SpaceX's start. However, he was definitely not the first private manufacturer in both of these sectors. Modern electric car models were produced and sold or leased since the mid-1990s by many car companies such as Honda, Nissan, Chevrolet, Ford, and Toyota, but all of these productions sold very poorly and none of them was able to make past 320 km in one charge. [\(2\)](#) Considering the charging time of these vehicles this was a major flaw against long-distance travel. Tesla's 2008 Roadster solved this problem with its lithium-ion battery and became the best-selling electric car at the time.

Tesla's improvements on electric vehicles as a whole is definitely a success, but the real mark on his acknowledgement as a genius pioneer comes from the development of the reusable launch system in rockets. The idea was tried before by NASA but it was failed and then scrapped out. SpaceX's success cut the average cost of space shuttle launches from 450 million dollars for Soyuz rockets to a mere 50 million dollars for Falcon 9. (3) These innovations are surely a form of pioneering and it is said that Musk tries to take part in every technical decision the companies make which may contribute to his label as a genius. These combined with his already mentioned social and online fame alongside his persona as a humble, hard-working nerd made the people coin him as a genius pioneer who takes his steps for the betterment of the human civilization instead of just economic profit. However, it should not be forgotten that SpaceX and Tesla's major successes cannot be just associated with Elon Musk alone, as there are whole teams of workers, engineers, and scientists behind every little step. These teams of engineers and scientists are incredibly vital to the pioneering aspect of these two companies, yet these people are most of the time shadowed behind Musk's immense fame and popularity which results in him earning all the credits for successes. The populace needs to understand the difference between companies and their CEO. He is the lead designer in SpaceX and the product architect in Tesla, so of course he is very important, but his acclamation of all the credits is just a social engineering fallacy for fame.

Below is a picture from SpaceX's February 2018 Falcon Heavy Rocket launch which had a Tesla Roadster as the cargo. The act itself is an example of Elon Musk's desire of combining ingenuity with extravagant stunts to create a shock effect on global media. The event was talked about for many weeks around the world which greatly furthered Musk's fame and popularity as it was his plan.



Tesla Roadster in Space [\(4\)](#)

Secondly, let us try to understand better why some people view Elon Musk as a capitalist thief. Of course, this argument also has truthful and false points as the issue is not black and white. So, is Elon Musk really a capitalist thief? The answer to this question lies in understanding who he may be stealing from. The government, his employees, the people, or maybe all of them? SpaceX costs NASA additional 12 million dollars just for profit every time they conduct a launch, this could be taken as theft but there are more important issues on hand. It is widely known that employees in Tesla and SpaceX are overworked and not nearly compensated enough for their efforts as twelve hours a day and six days a week work schedule is supposedly the norm for many people under Musk's employment. Also, an investigation by the guardian and an independent workplace safety organization revealed that Tesla's northern California factory is prone to very high levels of workplace injuries. These examples show us that after all a desire for profit and employee mistreatment is clearly evident in Musk's companies. Furthermore, his social media tweets during the past year about his dislike for lockdowns showed a complete disregard for employee safety. Actually, these tweets are not the only controversial ones that Elon Musk made. He is clearly aware of his influence and he uses it to alter the stock exchanges and cryptocurrency values by tweeting upon them. He tweets about supporting a stock or cryptocurrency and this increases the value of the stock or cryptocurrency as many people trust him believing that he knows the best as a tech-giant. It is revealed that Musk always buys a lot of stocks or cryptocurrencies before tweeting about them, although he still denies this fact. [\(5\)](#) After the product increases in value due to his tweets, he sells his shares or holdings and makes a great profit out of it. However, his selling a large value of a stock or cryptocurrency affects the value of the stock or cryptocurrency, and it falls once again. These incidents caused many people who bought these things because of their trust in Elon Musk to lose their

money. Understandably, after all these incidents many people do not believe in Musk's humbleness or hard-working nature as much as they did before.

Many reached the conclusion that he is just a capitalist thief who uses other people for his own benefit. However, that is not entirely true either. Musk is definitely a shrewd businessman, but that should be understood as a norm when we look at the economic system of American capitalism. Being shrewd is essential to climb the economic ladder and Musk managed to climb it to its top. Essentially, he plays the game of capitalism by its legal rules whether it is moral or not, and that legal but immoral greyness allows him to amass his fame and fortune.

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@elonmusk

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Elon Musk's Tweet about the Coronavirus and Lockdowns [\(6\)](#)



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Elon Musk's Tweet about the Coronavirus and Lockdowns [\(6\)](#)



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 235  1.4K  6.0K 

A Response Tweet to Musk's Bitcoin Tweet [\(7\)](#)



Ben Mezrich 
@benmezrich · 8 Oca

I'll tell you one thing, I'm never turning down getting paid in bitcoin again.

 363

 1,6 B

 35,2 B



Elon Musk 
@elonmusk

@benmezrich adlı kişiye yanıt olarak

Me neither

ÖS 8:28 · 9 Oca 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

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Elon Musk's Tweet about Bitcoin [\(6\)](#)



Elon Musk's Tweets about Bitcoin (6)

Finally, it can be said that Elon Musk is in the middle of both of the arguments. The successes of him and his companies cannot be refuted. However, his persona has great room for doubt. He is a shrewd businessman more than he is humble, and maybe he earns more credit than he should be given. But in the end, he is no saint nor devil, and whether he is a genius pioneer or a capitalist thief, Tesla and SpaceX's innovations ultimately help the human civilization in the long run.