

Musk diving into minds while reaching for Mars (Update)

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Elon Musk, pictured in 2015, referenced a new company called Neuralink in a tweet, promising to elaborate in a blog post

Not content to reach for Mars and dethrone fossil fuels, tech entrepreneur Elon Musk on Tuesday is turning his focus to delving into people's minds.

In a message fired off Tuesday on Twitter, Musk appeared to confirm he

is creating a startup called Neuralink devoted to enabling brains to interface directly with computers, accessing processing power and perhaps even downloading memories for storage.

"Long Neuralink piece coming out on (blog platform) @waitbutwhy in about a week. Difficult to dedicate the time, but existential risk is too high not to," Musk tweeted.

The Twitter post by the founder of electric carmaker Tesla and exploration firm SpaceX came a day after a Wall Street Journal report saying the company had been formed.

The Journal reported that the new startup will focus on "neural lace" technology which involves implanting tiny brain electrodes capable of uploading and downloading thoughts.

The report said Musk may play a "significant leadership role" even as he runs two other large companies.

Musk has previously spoken about the idea of neural lacing, claiming it can magnify people's brain power by linking them directly to computing capabilities.

Battling evil

The risk that he referred to in his Twitter post was likely linked to his concern that artificial intelligence could become a threat to humans.

Musk not long ago found himself in the middle of a technology world controversy by holding firm that AI could turn on humanity and be its ruin instead of a salvation.

He took part in creating a nonprofit research company devoted to

developing artificial intelligence that will help people and not hurt them.

Technology giants including Google, Apple and Microsoft have been investing in making machines smarter, contending the goal is to improve lives.

"If we create some digital super-intelligence that exceeds us in every way by a lot, it is very important that it be benign," Musk said last year at a conference in California.

He reasoned that even a benign situation with ultra-intelligent AI would put people so far beneath the machine they would be "like a house cat."

"I don't love the idea of being a house cat," Musk said, envisioning the creation of neural lacing that magnifies people's brain power by linking them directly to computing capabilities.

Tencent takes to Tesla

Considered one of Silicon Valley's most notable visionaries, Musk is the force behind Tesla, part of an effort to move the automotive industry away from fossil fuels to electric propulsion.

In a separate announcement Tuesday, Tesla confirmed China's giant Tencent Holdings has taken a five percent stake in the electric car company as it moves to ramp up production.

Tencent paid about \$1.8 billion for the small share of Musk's company, according to the document filed with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

The Chinese technology company runs WeChat, the world's most popular messaging service, as well as many mobile game platforms.

"Tencent has smartly realized the Tesla's Industry creation potential," Global Equities Research analyst Trip Chowdhry said in a note to investors.

Tesla early in March announced plans to raise \$1.15 billion in new funding to help fuel production of a mass market-targeted Model 3 electric car set for release this year.

The company forecast in February that demand for its cars would show strong growth in the first half of this year, as orders for some models hit a record high, even while posting a loss at the end of last year.

Tesla in January launched a "Gigafactory" with Panasonic to mass produce the lithium-ion battery cells used in energy storage products and the Model 3, which is priced at a moderate \$35,000.

Musk also runs SpaceX, maker and launcher of rockets and spacecraft, which recently announced plans to send two private citizens around the Moon in what would mark the farthest humans have ever traveled to deep space since the 1970s.

Musk lives in Los Angeles and holds US, Canadian and South African citizenship.

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