



Manchester United: Why Twitter buzz + increased share price does not = takeover

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Late on Monday night and into Tuesday morning it appeared there was finally some white smoke concerning the proposed [Manchester United](#) takeover.

The club's shares on the New York Stock Exchange climbed 16.3 per cent to \$23.42 (£18.63) in the after-hours trading session after reports that the Glazer family were selling 100 per cent of the club to Sheikh Jassim through his Nine Two Foundation, and Sir Jim Ratcliffe's INEOS group had missed out.

The share price continued to increase overnight, passing \$24 before the markets opened. Yet even sources close to the Qatari bid — who, like others in this article, will remain anonymous to protect business relationships — were surprised by such talk and had been blindsided by this “news” being shared by aggregator accounts on social media.

Bid insiders also insisted there has been no communication about the Glazers' decision, or if it has even been made.

The rumour appears to trace back to a Twitter account, apparently based in Cardiff in Wales, advertising illegal football streaming with barely 300 followers, which was then amplified by a major Qatari newspaper and its editor.

It quickly spread through social media; gaining so much traction that it briefly looked like the long-running saga was over. The Glazers announced they were considering “strategic alternatives” that could lead to a [potential sale of the club back in November](#).

But that does not appear the case.

To be clear, this does not mean that the Qatari takeover will not happen and these reports will not end up being true.

But, based on existing evidence, let *The Athletic* use this example to explain how the takeover rumour mill works...

The Al Watan tweet

The Al Watan newspaper is one of the biggest publications in Qatar alongside Al Sharq and Al Raya.

The newspaper's Twitter account has more than 290,000 followers and has been verified with a blue tick since 2015, meaning it was recognised as a legitimate publication long before Twitter users have been able to simply buy verification under Elon Musk's ownership.

As sources go, this is one to take seriously.

Many on social media, as well as other media reports, also noticed that on Wikipedia, Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani — Sheikh Jassim's father and Qatar's prime minister between 2007 and 2013 — was cited as the newspaper's owner. An account under the name of Al Watan's editor has subsequently said the newspaper is not owned by the man known as HBJ. The Al Watan account tweeted this at 7.14pm UK time on Tuesday:

A Google translation of the Arabic text is how many Twitter users in the UK and beyond will have picked up the news. The translation says: "Press reports: The success of Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad bin Jassim's acquisition of #ManchesterUnited... and the announcement of the deal soon."

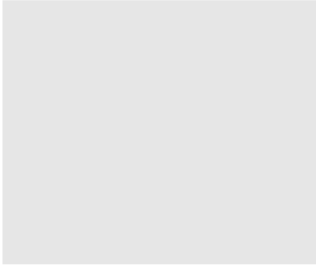
Verifying this with an Arabic native speaker suggests this is an accurate translation. The tweet does explicitly say Jassim has bought Manchester United, the deal will be announced soon, and that the saga is over.

So if the translation is good — and this legitimate source says the takeover is going through — why should we still exercise caution?

Digging deeper

If this is true, it would be a huge scoop for Al Watan; a chance to celebrate a genuine world exclusive. But looking elsewhere on the newspaper's accounts, there is no mention of it.

The newspaper's website (below) leads on new rules for supplying food to school canteens from the Department for Education.



أقرأ المزيد <

كتاب الوطن



محمد المري
رئيس التحرير

أقرأ المزيد <



آخر الأخبار

تعليم توضح شروط الوجبات الغذائية في
مدارس

ير الدولة لشؤون الطاقة يدعو شركات القطاع
يلاء اهتمام أكبر بالتقطير الاستراتيجي

يشر بورصة قطر يربح نحو 80 نقطة بداية
عاملات

لة قطر تترأس الاجتماع التنسيقي لوزراء
شؤون الاجتماعية العرب بنيويورك

معة قطر تعلن عن تفاصيل تنظيم المؤتمر
علمي العاشر لطلاب الصيدلة على مستوى...

يان المشترك للحوار الاستراتيجي الثاني بين دولة
طر وجمهورية فرنسا

الوطن الرياضي

الوطن الاقتصادي

الوطن

The website also carries a story about [Erling Haaland](#) being [Manchester City](#)'s player of the year but nothing on their cross-city rivals.

There is no mention of the story on Al Watan Qatar's Facebook page, either, which has 1.2 million followers and has been updated in the last few hours, long after the tweet from the official account.

The editor

A second seemingly legitimate source for the story is the Al Watan editor Fahad El Amadi, who has been verified on Twitter since July 2016. An account under his name sent a tweet a few hours before the Al Watan tweet which appeared to say that the takeover was a done deal.

The tweet is translated to "All the news received indicates the success of Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad bin Jassim's acquisition of Manchester United, and the announcement of the deal will be very soon".

However, there is some ambiguity with this translation. It is not clear whether "news received" means that this social media user has independently verified the report with reliable sources, or has simply seen rumours online.

The tweet does not explicitly confirm the sourcing of the news.

Breaking news... from Wales?

Before 12.05pm on Monday June 12, an account called @2sporttv tweeted that the takeover was a done deal.

Retweeted فهد العمادي



2SportTV @2sporttv · 23h
BREAKING NEWS!!

Agreement has been reached between Sheikh Jassim and Manchester United announcement will be in soon, and Qatar 🇶🇦 will be the new owner of Manchester United.

[#MUFC](#) [#SheikhJassimInAtManUtd](#) [#QatarInAtManchesterUnited](#)
[#QatarIn](#) [#Mufc](#) [#ManUtd](#) [#2sport](#)



76 522 4,541 284.8K

This tweet was retweeted by the El Amadi account and this retweet was still visible on the account 24 hours later.

Yet the @2sporttv account is clearly not a legitimate source.

This is an account advertising illegal football streaming, with barely 300 Twitter followers, listing its location as Cardiff in Wales; it seems to be a highly dubious source for news of this magnitude.

Not done yet

So an account bearing the name of the editor of Al Watan tweeted after a small account in Wales said that the takeover was going through. The Al Watan account then tweeted it in a way that appeared official.

The rumour then spread on social media and [‘Qatar’](#) was trending on Twitter in the UK by Tuesday morning.

The constellation of football aggregator accounts gave the rumours further strength, and United’s share price boomed.

On Tuesday, the account of editor Fahad El Amadi issued a statement: “For more clarification, ‘Contrary to certain media and social media reports overnight, Al Watan is not owned by Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani, and Al Watan’s media report yesterday speculating about possible movement in the Manchester United takeover process was based on international media reports, as stated in the article itself, and with such news widely circulating periodically in international media for many months.’”

And yet, after 24 hours of fervent social media activity and United’s share price continuing to increase, it appears we are no closer to any “possible movement” in the United takeover saga. Al Watan and El Amadi have been contacted for comment.