Twitter Data Now Comes With a Price

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Elon Musk, the current owner of Twitter, who once promoted the need for transparency on the social media platform, is now threatening Twitter through further monetization. As of February 2, Twitter will be charging users $100 per month along with ID verification to use the formerly freely accessible [Twitter API](https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/twitter-api), the protocol that allows users to extract and share online data. Now, countless students’ and researchers’ projects are at stake, and we are forced to wonder what Twitter’s latest money quest means for the future of social media accessibility.

Twitter’s API allows users to utilize the platforms data, tweets, threads, posts, to analyze anything from trolling and misinformation to politics and current events. Twitter has an average of [353.9 million users worldwide](https://www.statista.com/statistics/303681/twitter-users-worldwide/), making this specific API highly informative. Naturally, the announcement on Twitter sparked an outcry from researchers, students, and educators.

Jakub, a data science student, wanted to use the Twitter API for fun, to automate some tweets. After his application to use the interface got denied, he tweeted “.. I doubt ill ever apply again. Certainly not if its going to cost me upward of $100/month.”

As a data science student, I applied for access to the Twitter API as a fun way to automate some innocuous tweets. I was denied. At this point, I doubt I will ever apply again. Certainly not if it's going to cost me upward of $100/month.

— 🌍 Јаков Минг Дановић 🌏 (@chenx064) February 19, 2023

For students, the API provides an opportunity to explore their interests, and further their research skills. Sudden changes to Twitter’s API policy put research and students at a disadvantage.

This latest update also poses a threat to education. For Kay Rogage on Twitter, a university professor, a large part of their coursework and assessments relies on the API. Rogage tweeted, “..This affects what we teach students whilst demonstrating the instability and unreliability of Twitter. Any thoughts on an educational license?”

I've used the free API to teach uni undergrads API dev for yrs now. A large part of my course material and assessment relies on the API. This affects what we teach students whilst demonstrating the instability and unreliability of Twitter. Any thoughts on an educational license?

— Kay Rogage (@KayRogage) February 19, 2023

An educational license is a very interesting suggestion, given the fact that the Twitter API comes at no cost for qualifying researchers. This application is only eligible for graduate students and faculty, or research focused employees affiliated with an academic university with a clear research objective, and their work cannot be for commercial use. As of now, there is not an educational license for students and educators.

When Elon Musk purchased Twitter for 44 billion dollars in October 2022, he wanted to preserve Twitter as a venue for free speech and enhance overall data transparency. Since then, Musk has made a monthly subscription to charge for the blue check mark verification at 8 dollars a month and laid off more than half of its employees without formal notice. Now, Musk claims that the API has been abused by “bot scammers” and “opinion manipulators.” It seems that Musk’s latest changes to the social media platform contradict his original intentions.

Yeah, free API is being abused badly right now by bot scammers & opinion manipulators. There’s no verification process or cost, so easy to spin up 100k bots to do bad things.Just ~$100/month for API access with ID verification will clean things up greatly.

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) February 2, 2023

It is difficult to understand how Twitter could come to a decision as drastic as charging users for the API, especially when user retention and quality research is at risk. It is possible that users will shy away from the platform and rely on free APIs such as Reddit. It will be important to keep an eye out to see how the future of Twitter will unfold.