Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

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Would you pay not to be considered a liar?

The owner of Twitter, Elon Musk, might sincerely believe that he would make his network "the most trusted place on the internet" as he announced last week.

It would be foolish to underestimate the entrepreneurial gift of the richest man on the planet. The network he acquired for $44 billion last autumn goes beyond ordinary business.

To make it the "most trusted place on the internet", Musk would have to make himself the most trusted person on Twitter, and at the same time, all 550 million users.

His network, similar to all other social media, simply does not have an identity to be trusted. In order to be what its owner wants it must strive to make all its users (identities) realise its vision. In order to be trusted.

Regulation through a bank account

At the beginning of April, Musk and Twitter started aggressively to try to regulate the content published online, understanding from the history of the Internet that only companies, as owners of the platforms, could attempt this.

This attempt has been rather clumsy and unconvincing, raising a whole series of questions, including the most important one which is whether the owners of social media can make their platforms trustworthy.

Twitter has started charging for the service, which was free until now. A blue badge is now proof that the person or organisation is authentic, and that they are who they say they are.

The company announced that as of April 1, it would begin removing blue checks from so-called "legacy accounts" that have gained the authenticity mark through verification.

From now on, anyone who wants a blue badge on Twitter will have to pay $8 as an individual or $1,000 as an organisation.

Monetising authenticity

Twitter is essentially trying to monetise a free space through those who care enough to have their authenticity verified in some way - with a blue badge, for example.

We can still trust that Musk wants to banish fake authors and copycats from his platform, but it would be challenging to do so this way.

All you have to do now is have a phone and a credit card to buy a blue badge for $8 or $1,000, and proceed to impersonate some authentic sports or pop star or a reliable international media.

This innovation of the newly established media owner was immediately opposed by brands for whom "being trusted" has been a sacred obligation since they were founded 150 or 170 years ago. It has also been the foundation of their business.

The New York Times, Washington Post, LA Times, and dozens of other major media outlets have announced they would not pay Twitter's new fee. Politico will not pay a blue badge fee for its reporters; nor will The White House pay a fee for its employees.

The media giants do not want to pay a cent to prove their information is reliable.

They consider their brand, history, and the integrity of their journalists to be a stronger proof of trustworthiness than any blue badge.

Who wants to give up Lebron James?

Here lies the essential difference between the Twitter owner and his clients with a trustworthy reputation, in the understanding of the words "being trusted".

ll take it off then", Musk responded to the New York Times' refusal to pay for the verification of its authenticity on Twitter.

This reaction is an arrogant response to a "client's" remark, which is not an ordinary client, because, with 54 million followers, The New York Times is the 24th most followed account.

Will the owner of the platform respond to LeBron James in the same way, after his announcement that he will not pay the monthly fee for the blue badge, and has 52 million followers (10% of the total Twitter "population")?

Twitter cannot "enforce" trustworthiness and credibility by simply taxing someone's desire to be recognised as trustworthy and credible.

The big media and celebrities are trying to show by refusing to pay for proof that they are authentic and trustworthy.

Russia Today and BBC in the same category

Twitter will not become a more reliable place by sharing, without much consideration, the label that a media outlet is subservient to the government, as it has now been assigned to the BBC.

Since a few days ago, "Government Funded Media" stands next to the Twitter account @BBC, which has 2.2 million followers.

Twitter imposed this mark, even though the BBC is funded from a license fee paid by households, not government funds.

Thus, Twitter deceived 2.2 million followers of the British public service, despite the proclaimed desire to warn those same users about someone's closeness to the state, that is, about the possible bias of their information.

National Public Radio (NPR) fared even worse. It received the "State Affiliated Media" label from Twitter, the same one Twitter had rightly attached to the Russian propaganda corporation Russia Today and the Chinese agency Xinhua.

After the reaction of NPR that they would not publish any information under the new label, Twitter changed it to "Government Funded Media", although this media is also largely financed by corporate sponsorships and membership fees.

Six months ago, Daphne Keller, head of the Programme on Platform Regulation at Stanford University, estimated that "we are approaching a pivotal moment for online speech".

It is possible that the moment has already arrived, and that we are witnessing a significant clash between large media with a long tradition and the owners of digital platforms for sharing content over the fundamental values of public speaking -

truthfulness and reliability.

Taxing someone's century-old reputation, or putting a stamp on information that has passed the objectivity test for decades, will not make Twitter, or any other platform, a place of trust.