# Blue Checkmark & Impact of Elon Musk's Changes to X's Verification System

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Originally, the blue checkmark on Twitter was a symbol of authenticity and trust. Introduced in 2009, it served to verify the identities of celebrities, public figures, and organizations, differentiating them from impostors and parodies [1]. This system provided a means for users to identify genuine accounts, particularly in cases where impersonation could have significant consequences, such as for government officials or major corporations [2]. The blue checkmark quickly became an industry standard, adopted by other social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram to combat the proliferation of fake accounts [1].

However, the landscape of verification on what is now known as X has undergone a dramatic transformation under Elon Musk's ownership. In 2022, Musk introduced a paid verification system, effectively turning the once-coveted blue checkmark into a subscription service [3]. This move sparked controversy and raised questions about the future of trust and authenticity on the platform.

## Changes to the Verification System

One of the most significant changes Musk implemented was the introduction of Twitter Blue, a subscription-based model that allows users to purchase a blue checkmark [3]. This fundamentally altered the meaning of verification on the platform, blurring the lines between verified public figures and paying subscribers.

Further, X introduced a tiered system with different colored checkmarks to distinguish various account types [4]:

| Badge Color | Account Type | Description |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Blue | X Premium Subscriber | Indicates an active X Premium subscription. |
| Gray | Government Accounts | Reserved for government bodies and officials. |
| Gold | Businesses | Authenticates official business accounts. |

This new system aimed to reduce bot activity and generate revenue, but it has faced criticism for potentially enabling impersonation and eroding trust in the platform [3]. It is important to note that while users with 2,500 verified followers get access to premium features, this does not automatically grant them a free checkmark [5].

This shift in the verification system has had a profound impact on the user experience. Previously, the blue checkmark served as a reliable indicator of an account's authenticity. Now, with the ability to purchase verification, the blue checkmark has lost its value as a symbol of trustworthiness [1]. This change has led to confusion among users and raised concerns about the spread of misinformation and impersonation on the platform.

# X Premium

X Premium, formerly known as Twitter Blue, is a subscription service that offers users a range of features in exchange for a monthly fee. These features include:
- **Verification:** A blue checkmark next to the user's name.
- **Priority in replies and mentions:** Increased visibility in conversations.
- **Longer posts:** The ability to write longer tweets.
- **Edit Tweet:** The option to edit tweets after posting.
- **Fewer ads:** A reduced number of advertisements in the feed.

X Premium offers different tiers with varying features and pricing: Basic, Premium, and Premium+ [6]. This tiered system provides users with options based on their needs and budget, but it also reinforces the idea that certain features and privileges are reserved for paying customers.

# X's Revenue Model

While advertising remains a significant source of revenue for X, it has faced challenges in recent years. X reported a decline in advertising revenue, prompting the need to explore alternative revenue streams [7]. It is crucial to recognize that the introduction of paid verification and X Premium is primarily a revenue-generating strategy for the platform [7]. By offering a subscription service with exclusive features, X aims to increase its revenue and reduce its reliance on advertising.

This shift towards a subscription-based model has significant implications for the platform's future. It raises questions about the accessibility of features, the potential for a two-tiered user system, and the overall impact on user experience.

# Psychological Effects on Users

The introduction of paid verification has had notable psychological effects on X users. Some users who have purchased verification have reported feeling a sense of elitism or superiority [9]. This perception stems from the idea that they have acquired a status symbol that differentiates them from non-paying users.

Furthermore, the ability to purchase verification has created an illusion of "elite" status, where users may perceive themselves as being more important or influential simply because they have a blue checkmark [9]. This psychological effect can influence user behavior and interactions on the platform.

However, it's important to consider the broader user experience. Some users have expressed frustration with the prominence given to verified users in replies and mentions, even if those replies are irrelevant or low-quality [10]. This can create a sense of imbalance and contribute to a negative perception of paid verification.

# Impact on Discourse and Manipulation

The shift to a paid verification system has raised concerns about its potential impact on discourse and manipulation on X. Research suggests that a large number of verified users with strong opinions can drive polarization and the formation of echo chambers [11]. This is because verified users may be perceived as more credible or influential, leading others to readily accept their views without critical evaluation.

Moreover, the potential for manipulation arises from the fact that users can purchase verification, regardless of their intentions or the accuracy of the information they share. This can create an environment where misinformation and propaganda can spread more easily, as verified accounts may be given more weight and visibility.

# Comparison with Other Platforms

While X has adopted a paid verification model, other social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram have maintained different approaches. Facebook, for example, requires users to meet specific criteria and provide identification to be verified [12]. This process aims to ensure that verified accounts represent real people or legitimate entities.

Similarly, Instagram has a verification process that considers factors like authenticity, uniqueness, completeness, and notability [13]. While Instagram also offers a paid subscription service called Meta Verified, it still maintains a separate verification process for accounts that meet its criteria.

These different approaches highlight the varying priorities and strategies of social media platforms in handling verification. While X has prioritized revenue generation through paid verification, Facebook and Instagram have focused on maintaining authenticity and credibility through more stringent verification processes.

# Conclusion

Elon Musk's changes to the verification system on X have had a significant impact on the platform, transforming it from a space where authenticity was paramount to one where status can be purchased. The introduction of paid verification has created an illusion of elitism, blurred the lines between verified figures and paying subscribers, and raised concerns about the potential for manipulation and the spread of misinformation.

While the financial motivations behind these changes are clear, the long-term consequences for X remain to be seen. The platform's future will depend on how it addresses the challenges of maintaining trust, ensuring authenticity, and fostering healthy discourse in a paid verification landscape.

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