

**United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation**  
**Examining Safeguards for Consumer Data Privacy**  
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Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today to discuss the important issue of consumer data privacy.

Twitter's purpose is to serve the public conversation. We serve our global audience by focusing on the people who use our service, and we put them first in every step we take. People around the world use Twitter as a "town square" to publicly, openly, and freely exchange ideas. We must be a trusted and healthy place in order for this exchange of ideas and information to continue.

To ensure such trust, the privacy of the people who use our service is of paramount importance to Twitter. We believe privacy is a fundamental right, not a privilege. Privacy is part of Twitter's DNA. Since Twitter's creation over a decade ago, we have offered a range of ways for people to control their experience on Twitter, from creating pseudonymous accounts to letting people control who sees their Tweets, in addition to a wide array of granular privacy controls. This deliberate design has allowed people around the world using Twitter to protect their privacy.

That same philosophy guides how we work to protect the data people share with Twitter. Twitter empowers the people who use our services to make informed decisions about the data they share with us. We believe individuals should know, and have meaningful control over, what data is being collected about them, how it is used, and when it is shared. And we believe that the time is right for industry, civil society, and government to work together to develop a robust privacy framework that protects individuals' rights by ensuring transparency and accountability while preserving the freedom to innovate.

This testimony provides information about the Twitter service, including (1) how people can communicate on Twitter; (2) the information we receive; and (3) an overview of how Twitter uses data and the tools Twitter provides individuals to manage their data.

## **I. COMMUNICATING ON TWITTER**

Twitter was conceived and designed to be a platform for public conversation. This is the key feature of the service and what sets Twitter apart from many other Internet companies. When an individual creates a Twitter account and begins Tweeting, his or her Tweets are public.

Tweets are immediately viewable and searchable by anyone around the world, regardless of whether they possess a Twitter account. Similarly, when an individual follows another Twitter account or likes another Tweet, others can see the followed accounts and the Tweets that the individual liked. People understand the default public nature of Twitter and come to Twitter expecting to see and join in public conversations on topics that interest them. Thus, when individuals Tweet, they control the content they share, including how personal or private the content may be. This is how Twitter is designed and is a main part of the attraction and value proposition the platform provides to its customers.

While most people come to Twitter to join the public conversation, Twitter also provides a number ways to communicate non-publicly. For example, an individual can protect their account by changing their settings. If an individual protects his or her account, their Tweets will not be public by default. Instead, Tweets from protected accounts are only visible to the followers an individual has approved and will not appear in third-party search engines, like Google Search. Additionally, people can communicate with one another without Tweeting publicly by using the Direct Messaging feature.

## **II. INFORMATION TWITTER RECEIVES**

Although the information people share on Twitter is generally public, Twitter also receives non-public personal information. For example, a person creating a Twitter account must provide the platform with his or her email address or phone number. Twitter will also receive standard log information, such as the device being used and the Internet Protocol (IP) address. People who use the service may also choose to share additional information with Twitter including, for example, their address book contacts in order to connect with people they know, help others find and connect with them, and better recommend content to them and others.

In addition, and consistent with nearly all other online platforms, Twitter uses cookies and other similar technologies, such as pixels or local storage, to operate its services and help provide individuals on the platform with a better, faster, and safer experience. Cookies are small files that websites place on a computer as an individual browses the web. Like many websites, Twitter uses cookies to discover how people are using the services and to make them work better. Twitter also uses cookies to help serve people more relevant content based on where they have seen Twitter content on the web, and to serve targeted advertising. Twitter provides individuals with additional control over whether their data is used for these purposes.

In order to show people the most interesting and relevant content, Twitter may infer information about individuals based on their activity on the platform and other information. This includes inferences such as what topics people may be interested in, how old a person is, what languages a person speaks, and whether the content of one account may be of interest to others on the platform. For example, Twitter may infer that an individual is a basketball fan based on accounts the individual follows and suggest content related to the National Basketball Association. Inferences assist Twitter in offering better services and personalizing the content Twitter shows, including advertisements.

Twitter uses the data it receives to deliver, measure, and improve services in a variety of ways, including: protecting the services; authentication and security; remembering preferences; improving analytics and research, including Twitter Ads and Twitter buttons and widgets; customizing Twitter services with more relevant content like tailored trends, stories, advertisements, and suggestions for people to follow; and assisting in delivering advertisements, measuring their performance, and making them more relevant.

### **III. TRANSPARENCY AND CONTROLS**

Twitter believes individuals should know, and have meaningful control over, what data is being collected about them, how it is used, and when it is shared. Twitter is always working to improve transparency into what data is collected and how it is used. Twitter designs its services so that individuals can control the personal data that is shared through our services. People that use our services have tools to help them control their data. For example, if an individual has registered an account, through their account settings they can access, correct, delete or modify the personal data associated with their account.

#### **A. Data Transparency**

Twitter recently updated our Privacy Policy to include callouts, graphics, and animations designed to enable people to better understand the data we receive, how it is used, and when it is shared.

Twitter also provides a toolset called Your Twitter Data. Your Twitter Data tools provide individuals accessible insights into the type of data stored by Twitter, such as username, email address, and phone numbers associated with the account and account creation details. The birthdays and locations of individuals are also shown in the tool if they have previously been provided to Twitter.

Individuals using the Your Twitter Data tool can also see and modify certain information that Twitter has inferred about the account and device such as gender, age range, languages, and interests. People on Twitter can review inference information, advertisers who have included them in tailored audiences, and demographic and interest data from external advertising partners. The Your Twitter Data tool also allows people with a Twitter account to download a copy of their relevant data from Twitter. We recently updated the download feature of the Your Twitter Data tool to include additional information. Since that update on May 25, 2018, we have seen approximately 586,000 people around the world use the tool to download 560 terabytes of data.

There is a version of this tool available to individuals who do not have a Twitter account, or for those logged out of the account.

## **B. Tools for Managing Data**

When individuals on Twitter log into their accounts, they have immediate access to a range of tools and account settings to access, correct, limit, delete or modify the personal data provided to Twitter and associated with the account, including public or private settings, marketing preferences, and applications that can access their accounts. These data settings can be used to better personalize the individual's use of Twitter and allow him or her the opportunity to make informed choices about whether Twitter collects certain data, how it is used, and how it is shared.

For example, individuals can change the personalization and data settings for their Twitter account, including:

- Whether interest-based advertisements are shown to an individual on and off the Twitter platform;
- How Twitter personalizes an individual's experience across devices;
- Whether Twitter collects and uses an individual's precise location;
- Whether Twitter personalizes their experience based on places they have been; and
- Whether Twitter keeps track of the websites where an individual sees Twitter content.

An individual on Twitter can disable all personalization and data setting features with a single master setting prominently located at the top of the screen.

People on the platform can also deactivate their accounts. Deactivated Twitter accounts, including the display name, username, Tweets, and public profile information, are no longer viewable on Twitter.com, Twitter for iOS, and Twitter for Android.

## **C. Third Party Access to Twitter Data**

To share the public content on Twitter as widely as possible, we provide companies, developers, and other customers with programmatic access to public Twitter data through Application Programming Interfaces, or APIs. Twitter only discloses private information of individuals at the persons' direction or if the settings of the individual allow personal data to be disclosed, to protect the safety of any person, to protect the safety or integrity of our platform, and to address fraud, security, or technical issues. We also disclose data as reasonably necessary to comply with valid legal requests.

### **1. Developers and Partners**

The Twitter API provides broad access to public Twitter data that individuals have chosen to share with the world. Twitter also supports APIs that allow individual on the platform

to manage their own non-public Twitter information (e.g., Direct Messages) and provide this information to developers whom they have authorized.

New Enterprise and Premium API customers and data partners undergo a review process before they are granted access to Twitter data. That review examines the company's history, the proposed use of the data, and privacy and security considerations designed to prevent misuse of the data. Twitter routinely rejects use cases that do not comply with our rules, and we often require customers to revise and resubmit applications in order to ensure that they are in compliance with our policies.

In addition, our Developer Policy places a number of restrictions on how all developers—Enterprise partners as well as customers of our Premium and public APIs—may use Twitter data. Where warranted, Twitter takes enforcement action against applications found to be in violation of the Developer Agreement and Policy or the Twitter Rules.

## **2. Law Enforcement**

In the limited circumstances in which the disclosure of private personal data to law enforcement is necessary, Twitter does so only in response to appropriate legal process such as a subpoena, court order, or other valid legal process – or in response to a valid emergency request.

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To close, we believe privacy is a fundamental right, not a privilege. Twitter wants to empower all individuals who use our services to make the best decisions about the information they share with us. This is vital as the digital world we inhabit continues to evolve, change and impact our lives in important ways. The time is right for industry, civil society, and government to work together to develop a robust privacy framework that protects individuals' rights by ensuring transparency and accountability while preserving the freedom to innovate. We stand ready to assist the Committee as it continues to explore options to ensure the privacy of Americans is protected.