

Users must pay to create a Zalo account

Zalo requires users to text 5,000 VND to open an account, 1,000 VND if they forget their password, with the reason 'system busy'.

On the morning of February 14, when creating a Zalo account for a relative, Thanh Trung (Hanoi) was surprised when the application did not automatically send a verification code, but required him to compose a message to the switchboard 7539, charging 5,000 VND per message. The reason given by the platform was "The system is busy, cannot automatically send the verification code".

According to Mr. Trung, this is unusual for a popular messaging app to require users to pay a fee to register for an account. "The amount is not large, but it is inconvenient and cannot be considered a free app anymore," he said.

In addition, the reason "busy" cannot send automatic messages is also considered "unreasonable" for a platform that serves tens of millions of people. While if the user composes a message, the switchboard can send it immediately.



Zalo's announcement that the system is busy and asking users to compose a message with a fee of 5,000 VND. Photo: Tuan Hung

Not only when registering an account, if you forget your password, to retrieve it, Zalo requires authentication using the old device or via a code sent to the phone number. Previously, the platform would call or text the authentication code, but now users will have to text the switchboard 6020 (1,000 VND/message) or call the

switchboard themselves at a rate of 1,000 VND/minute.

"If I forget my password and my account runs out of money, I probably won't be able to use Zalo anymore," Phuong Thanh (HCMC) said after calling the hotline to get the verification code on February 14 because she changed her phone. She also wondered why she had to send each request to a different hotline with a different amount of money for the same code.

On app stores, since the beginning of February, many people have also complained about having to compose messages multiple times when they forget their password, because the code is not sent or the code does not work, causing more costs than before.

Zalo has not commented on this issue.

User authentication via phone number is one of the mandatory requirements for basic telecommunications services on the Internet, including messaging and calling applications over the network, such as Zalo. This is to comply with Decree 163 on the implementation of the Telecommunications Law, effective from January 2025.

Accordingly, users must provide at least the following information: registered name, mobile phone number, or other identification information if not using a phone number. Service providers are responsible for authenticating users via mobile phone number or identification information before providing services.

In fact, before the regulation, OTT applications such as Zalo, Telegram, Viber, and Messenger also used phone numbers to send user authentication codes. However, in most cases, they were the ones who actively sent the codes and users did not incur any costs.

Zalo has also tightened many free features in recent times. In 2022, the platform once issued a rule that non-paying users would be limited to a maximum of 1,000 friends and could only reply to messages from 40 strangers per month. Last August, Zalo reduced free storage from 1 GB to 500 MB. Users are also restricted from backing up their messaging data to an external cloud platform, and can only use zCloud for a minimum price of 490,000 VND.

Zalo is one of the most popular messaging and social networking platforms in Vietnam. According to statistics from the Ministry of Information and Communications, by mid-2024, the application will have about 76.5 million monthly users.

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