Why Meta's Threads app is the biggest threat to Twitter yet

By Lisa M. Given

7 Jul 2023

The launch of social media app Threads as a competitor to Twitter is a game-changer.

Meta, which also owns Facebook and Instagram, launched the new platform yesterday, ahead of schedule. Threads was welcomed almost immediately – especially by hordes of Twitter users that have watched in dismay as their beloved platform crumbles in the hands of Elon Musk

In less than 24 hours, Threads attracted some 30 million users. And with Meta already having more than two billion Instagram users who can directly link their accounts to it, Threads' user base will grow fast.

With its simple black and white feed, and features that let you reply, love, quote and comment on other people's "threads", the similarities between Threads and Twitter are obvious.

The question now is: will Threads be the one that finally unseats Twitter?

We've been here before

In October of last year, Twitter users looked on helplessly as Elon Musk became CEO. Mastodon was the first "escape

plan". But many found its decentralised servers [difficult](#) and [confusing to use](#), with each one having very different content rules and communities.

Many Twitter fans created "back up" Mastodon accounts in case Twitter crashed, and waited to see what Musk would do next. The wait wasn't long. Platform instability and outages became common as Musk started laying off Twitter staff (he has now fired about 80% of Twitter's original workforce).

Meta takes on Twitter with Threads and wins in the market
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Shortly after, Musk horrified users and made headlines by upending Twitter's verification system and forcing "blue tick" holders to pay for the privilege of authentication. This opened the door for account impersonations and the sharing of misinformation at scale. Some large corporate brands left the platform, taking their [advertising dollars with them](#).

Musk also labelled trusted news organisations such as the BBC as "state-owned" media, until public backlash forced him to retreat. More recently, he started limiting how many tweets users can view and announced that TweetDeck (a management tool for scheduling tweets) would be limited to paid accounts.

Twitter users have tried several alternatives, including Spoutible and Post. Bluesky, which came from Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey, is gaining ground – but its growth has been limited due to its invitation-only registration process.

Nothing had quite captured the imagination of Twitter followers … until now.

Community is the key to success

Before Musk's reign, Twitter enjoyed many years of success. It had long been a home for journalists, governments, academics and the public to share information on the key issues of the day. In emergencies, Twitter offered real-time support. During some of the worst disasters, users have shared information and [made life-saving decisions](#).

While not without flaws – such as trolls, [bots](#) and online abuse – Twitter's verification process and the ability to block and report inappropriate content was central to its success in building a thriving community.

This is also what sets Threads apart from competitors. By linking Threads to Instagram, Meta has given itself a significant head-start towards reaching the critical mass of users needed to establish itself as a leading platform (a privilege Mastodon didn't enjoy).

Not only can Threads users retain their usernames, they can also bring their Instagram followers with them. The ability to

retain community in an app that provides a similar experience to Twitter is what makes Threads the biggest threat yet.

My research shows that people crave authority, authenticity and community the most when they engage with online information. In our [new book](#), my co-authors Donald O. Case, Rebekah Willson and I explain how users search for information from sources they know and trust.

Twitter fans want an alternative platform with similar functionality, but most importantly they want to quickly find "their people". They don't want to have to rebuild their communities. This is likely why so many have stayed on Twitter, even as Musk has done so well to run it into the ground.

Challenges ahead

Of course, Twitter users may also be concerned about jumping from the frying pan into the fire. Signing up to yet another Meta app comes with its own concerns.

New Threads users who read the fine print will note that their information will be used to "personalize ads and other experiences" across both platforms. And users have pointed out you can only delete your Threads account if you delete your Instagram account.

This kind of entrenchment could be off-putting for some.

Moreover, Meta decided to not launch Threads anywhere in the European Union yesterday due to regulatory concerns. The EU's new Digital Markets Act could raise challenges for Threads.

For example, the act sets out businesses can't "track end users outside of [their] core platform service for the purpose of targeted advertising, without effective consent having been granted". This may be in conflict with Threads' [privacy policy](#).

Meta has also [announced plans](#) to eventually move Threads towards a decentralised infrastructure. In the app's "How Threads Works" details, it says "future versions of Threads will work with the [fediverse](#)", enabling "people to follow and interact with each other on different platforms, including Mastodon".

This means people will be able to view and interact with Threads content from non-Meta accounts, without needing to sign up to Threads. Using the ActivityPub standard (which enables decentralised interoperability between platforms), Threads could then function the same way as WordPress, Mastodon and email servers – wherein users of one server can interact with others.

When and how Threads achieves this plan for decentralised engagement – and how this might impact users' experience – is unclear.

Did Meta steal 'trade secrets'?

As for Musk, he's not going down without a fight. Just hours after Threads' release, Twitter's lawyer Alex Spiro released a letter accusing Meta of "systematic" and "unlawful misappropriation" of trade secrets.

The [letter](#) alleges former Twitter employees hired by Meta were "deliberately assigned" to "develop, in a matter of months, Meta's copycat 'Threads' app". Meta has disputed these claims, [according to reports](#), but the rivalry between the two companies seems far from over.

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