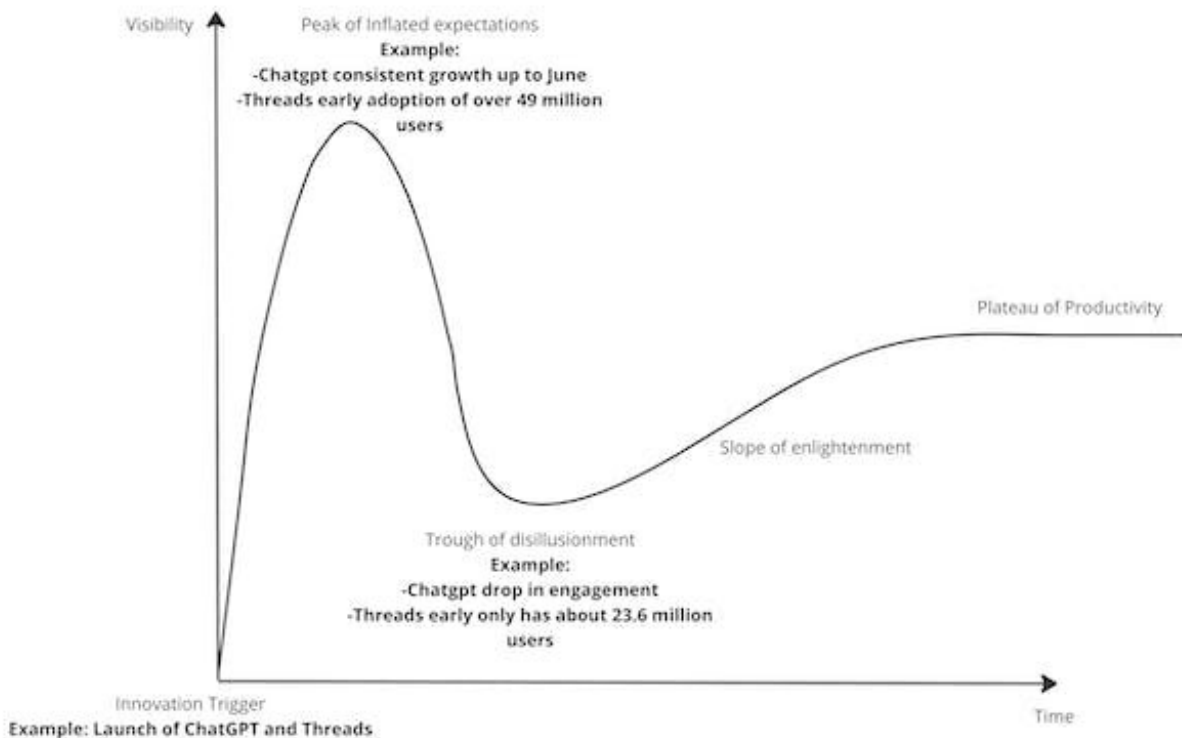# ChatGPT and Threads reflect the challenges of fast tech adoption

July 24 2023, by Omar H. Fares and Seung Hwan (Mark) Lee

A graph illustrating how ChatGPT and Threads fit into the Gartner Hype Cycle. Credit: Omar H. Fares and Seung Hwan Lee, Author provided

ChatGPT recently experienced a decline in user engagement for the first time since its launch in November 2022. From May to June, engagement dropped 9.7 percent, with the largest decline —10.3 percent—occurring

in the United States.

Meanwhile, Meta's Threads platform experienced a significant drop in user numbers, going from more than 49 million users on July 7 [to 23.6 million active users by July 14](#). In the same time frame, the average time users in the U.S. spent on the app dropped from a peak of 21 minutes in early July to just above six minutes.

In the tech world, companies are always racing to be the first ones to introduce new innovations, aiming for the "[first mover's advantage](#)." This refers to a firm's ability to get a head start over competitors by being the first to enter a new product category or market.

However, being a trailblazer doesn't guarantee an easy ride. While there are perceived [benefits](#), there are also a plethora of challenges that arise.

The recent declines of Threads and ChatGPT attest to this reality, demonstrating that rapid and widespread acceptance doesn't necessarily lead to long-term success.

There are a few reasons [why a fast adoption isn't necessarily the key to success](#) including unsustainable growth, inadequate scaling infrastructure and a lack of user retention strategies.

Unsustainable growth

The idea of unsustainable growth stems from a platform's inability to uphold or maintain the quality of the user experience while scaling up at a rapid pace.

This is where the real challenge lies: being able to effectively scale up a product or service. It is precisely at this junction that the concept of unsustainable growth intersects with the Gartner Hype Cycle.

The Gartner Hype Cycle is a model that shows the stages of emerging technology adoption: from the initial hype and inflated expectations, through disillusionment and skepticism, to practical and mainstream productivity.

In the context of unsustainable growth, products like ChatGPT and Threads appear to have reached the stage known as "peak of inflated expectations," where the publicity of a new product generates over-enthusiasm and unrealistic expectations. During this stage, users rapidly adopt the product due to its novelty and the hype surrounding it.

However, this stage often leads to the "trough of disillusionment." During this stage, the product fails to meet users' unrealistic expectations, causing a decline in their interest.

It indicates the product's growth may have outpaced its ability to provide an excellent user experience. Without enhancing the product based on user feedback, declining user engagement will ensue.

This rise and fall underscores the challenge of achieving sustainable growth in the face of rapid adoption. The initial hype often attracts a massive influx of users, but without a clear, scalable strategy for maintaining quality and engagement, platforms can quickly lose their appeal.

Inadequate scaling infrastructure

When a platform's user base expands at a rapid pace, the question of whether that platform's infrastructure can scale to the demands of its users becomes critical.

The sudden influx of users that accompanies a successful product launch can be a double-edged sword; it brings a wealth of opportunities for data

collection, user feedback and revenue, but also tests the scalability of the platform's infrastructure.

If the underlying technology, support services or operational strategies are not built to scale, the product might suffer from slow loading times, frequent crashes or a lack of timely customer support—all of which are detrimental to the user experience and a product's long-term success.

For instance, OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, had to limit ChatGPT-4 users to 25 messages every three hours due to infrastructure constraints—even for those with a paid membership. While this helps manage the infrastructure load, it presents a challenge from the user's perspective.

Users who were accustomed to unlimited interactions with ChatGPT-3 now find themselves paying for a service with limitations. This may inadvertently dampen user engagement and drive some users away, underscoring the delicate balance between managing infrastructure and maintaining user satisfaction.

Lack of user retention strategies

One reason why tech businesses struggle to retain users is because they don't prioritize user-centered design. By failing to incorporate user feedback in product development, businesses can end up offering a product that doesn't meet user needs.

In addition, businesses must provide effective support for users. Insufficient or unclear onboarding may leave users feeling lost and overwhelmed, leading them to abandon the product. In the case of ChatGPT, OpenAI provides a basic explanation of platform usage, but users are primarily responsible for exploring it themselves.

Users experiment with prompts [without a clear understanding of how to generate impactful responses](#), resulting in uncertainty and frustration. This lack of guidance may contribute to lower engagement rates, as observed in the recent decline.

Lastly, increasing concerns about security threats and privacy have raised questions about how new technologies are protecting their users. The conflict between the need for more personalized experiences and privacy can give rise to a phenomenon called the [personalization-privacy paradox](#).

As individuals grow increasingly uneasy about how their [personal information](#) is stored, the lack of proper regulations can lead to a decline in the use of personalized services or technologies.

While rapid user adoption is a promising start, it doesn't guarantee long-term success. Striking the right balance between growth and infrastructure scalability, adopting a user-centric approach, maintaining user trust and investing in continuous innovation are the cornerstones for enduring success in the competitive tech landscape.

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