

Q&A: Threads, X and the future of social media

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An estimated 100 million people have signed up for Threads since its launch on July 5, making it the fast-growing app of all time.

The real question, according to FIU social media expert Nancy Richmond, is are people going to stick around and actually use Meta's newest app?

Richmond, an FIU College of Business associate teaching professor, has taught social media courses for decades and witnessed new platforms come and go. Now, she explains what's driving the record-breaking popularity of the so-called Twitter alternative and what might be next for the future of social media.

Why the response to Threads? Is it related to what's going on with Twitter (now X)?

Social media has changed so quickly. In the beginning, people were excited. They believed it would create positive change in the world. It was a bright, shiny thing. Before, you'd have to send an email. Think about that. Then suddenly, with social media, you could talk to anyone in the world. But, over time, it became less shiny.

Twitter, in particular, has faced a lot of challenges with the algorithm and other change, and there's been backlash. For over a decade, it grew into a prominent social network, known for its iconic blue and white bird logo. A notable shift occurred this week, with Elon Musk initiating the dismantling of these longstanding brand elements. Musk said he hopes to turn Twitter into an "everything app" called X, which would encompass not only [social networking](#) but also banking and shopping. Will it work? Is this a wise move? Only time will tell. People don't like change. And it isn't easy to have everyone understand who you are by a symbol.

This is a real opportunity for Threads and other competitors. The advantages Twitter had over Threads is that it was a well-known brand with a devoted audience.

Threads can be seen as an alternative. A part of the appeal is the Instagram integration. Most Millennials and Gen Z are already on Instagram, and now they don't have to join yet another platform. They

can just stay where they already are. It's always easier to get people to try something new if they are already using it. That's one of the reasons Threads has been successful in signing up users.

What will make people stick around?

With any new innovation, there's always people who are excited, the early adopters. Then you still need to get everyone else, like people who don't care as much or have limited time. Logging in or creating an account is one thing. But it doesn't mean people will use the app. What will be telling is if they continue to use it a month from now.

That's where value comes in. What is the value of posting to Threads? Is it just one more thing someone has to do? Because if that is the case, people won't use it.

For example, some people might like Threads because it reminds them of old-school Twitter. Others might be avid Twitter users and feel Threads is missing components they value—like the ability to search and use hashtags—and may decide they aren't going to use both.

Are there any examples from the past where a social media platform launched and then flopped?

I've seen so many come and go. One good example is Google+. Like Threads, when it launched you could become a part of it if you were already a Google user. It was similar to Facebook, in some ways, and there was also this feature where you could create "circles," or communities. I thought it was cool. I went on there and built some groups. Guess what? I was the only one. Nobody came. Suddenly it was like, This isn't fun. I don't want to have a party by myself. So, I left. Eventually, Google got rid of it because no one was using it.

How was Google+ different? That was the problem. You need a unique niche. Twitter is not Facebook and Instagram. Pinterest is its own thing. So are Reddit and YouTube. They all have different audiences. Those audiences all find different value in each platform. Threads needs to offer some sort of special value.

Do you have advice for anyone venturing into Threads?

It's always a good idea to stay up to date with trends and try out a new platform. That's how you understand how it works and whether it has value for you.

In my classes, I talk a lot about personal branding because it's so important for students trying to find jobs. People have to know who they are, what they are good at and then showcase their skills. Social media is a way to do that. Especially if you want to be a thought leader or understand what's happening in technology: Join! See if you can find creative ways to use it. And have fun! Sometimes, when you jump on things early, you get a lot of engagement.

Threads may also be something businesses might want to explore. I work with marketing departments and companies, provide expert advice on how to use social media in a positive way to connect with their customers to build trust, because it is an important communication tool. But, I will say it depends on the company. Starbucks, for example, may have a lot of people on their social media team available to try out different platforms. But if you're a medium or small company, then it is harder. You have to focus your time and focus on where you get value. You need to know where your audience is hanging out. And then focus on that.

Having studied and taught social media for so long, what do you think is missing from today's apps?

I think we need to start thinking about how we can bridge the gap between online connections with our in-person connections. Right now, there's a loneliness epidemic. We're more connected than ever and also lonelier than ever. How can social media help us do this? Yes, there's negative with it. But there can also be positives.

I'm all about how social media can help us create more social good and community. Like how can we use social media in a positive way—to help the environment or help people with their [mental health](#) or whatever it is they want to do to be a better human being?

Related to this, what I see missing is connection through smaller groups, similar to what Facebook has, where you'd create communities for people who are interested in a specific topic, like protecting the ocean by picking up plastic. That could be powerful. And something we don't see on Instagram or other apps. But I think it would be valuable because it would let people join together in more positive ways. And [social media](#) could use a little more of that right now. Maybe that's where Threads comes in. Maybe not having some of the features of Twitter will make it a different experience. Maybe it creates a more friendly environment. Right now, we still don't know. We'll just have to wait and see.

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