

Brazilians flock to Bluesky and Threads after X suspension

September 5 2024, by Laura ABREU and Frederico CARVALHO



Screenshot of the Brazilian government's account on Bluesky.

Millions of Brazilians, including the president, have flocked to social media platforms such as Threads or Bluesky, where Portuguese has become the most spoken language in the few days since Elon Musk's X

was shut down in the country.

"Is anyone there?" asked numerous Brazilian netizens as they made their first tentative forays onto Bluesky, which said it had added more than two million new users since South America's largest nation banned X.

Access to the social network formerly known as Twitter was blocked on Saturday amid a standoff between Musk and Brazilian Supreme Court judge Alexandre de Moraes, who has made it his mission to crack down on disinformation.

The powerful and controversial judge took the measure after Musk, who calls himself a "free-speech absolutist," ignored a series of court decisions.

Bluesky, a social media network created by Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey, now counts 7.6 million users since the X suspension in Brazil.

Meanwhile, searches in Brazil for the term "Threads" have quadrupled since the ban.

The social network launched a little over a year ago by Meta—which also owns Facebook and Instagram—has 190 million users worldwide.

Threads did not respond to AFP requests for comment on new users since X went off the air.

However, both applications were among the most downloaded in Brazil in recent days, according to the Google Play Store.

'More welcoming'

"I feel like I've entered a more welcoming and less aggressive

community, even if I miss the sincerity that was on X," said Leon Leal, a student who has turned to Threads after a decade on the former Twitter.

Brazil counts 140 million Instagram users, making the transition towards Threads easier as it requires the same login details.

University professor Raul Nunes, who created a Twitter account in 2007, preferred to shift to Bluesky.



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"Bluesky has the advantage of having the same language and references as Twitter. However, it is a pity it doesn't have a 'Trending Topics' section and that you can't publish videos," he said.

Given the uncertainty over the fate of X, it is unclear whether the migration will have a lasting effect on the social networking landscape in Brazil, an ultra-connected country with more smartphones than inhabitants.

Raquel Recuero, an expert in social networks at the Federal University of Pelotas (Ufpel) in southern Brazil, said stranded X users will "probably spread across different platforms."

Hard-to-find profiles

Viktor Chagas, professor of cultural and media studies at the Federal University of Fluminense (UFF), said Brazilians were quickly moving to other platforms to stay connected to public debate in their country as well as trends elsewhere.

But the fact that these other platforms have a much smaller user base worldwide "can represent a certain isolation for Brazil."

Leal, for example, said he struggled to find Bluesky profiles for personalities he followed on X.

Chagas said Threads may have more users due to its link to Instagram, but it "arouses more distrust because it belongs to the Meta group" amid widespread concerns about data protection and online privacy.

Brazilian political figures are also looking for a new home online to stay connected to their base in a highly polarized country prone to fierce online debate.

Leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has begun publishing regular messages on Threads and Bluesky.

But there are still a few diehards, like his far-right predecessor Jair Bolsonaro, a fervent admirer of Elon Musk, who still does not have an account on Bluesky and uses Threads to promote his account on the Telegram messaging service.

Moraes threatened a fine of 50,000 reais (\$8,900) to anyone who used "technological subterfuges" to get around the block, such as a VPN—but some continue to do so.

One of Bolsonaro's loyalists, the fiery deputy Nikolas Ferreira, 28, declared on X on Monday: "I did not create an account on Bluesky. X is my country."

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