

We tried Threads, Meta's new Twitter rival. Here's what happened

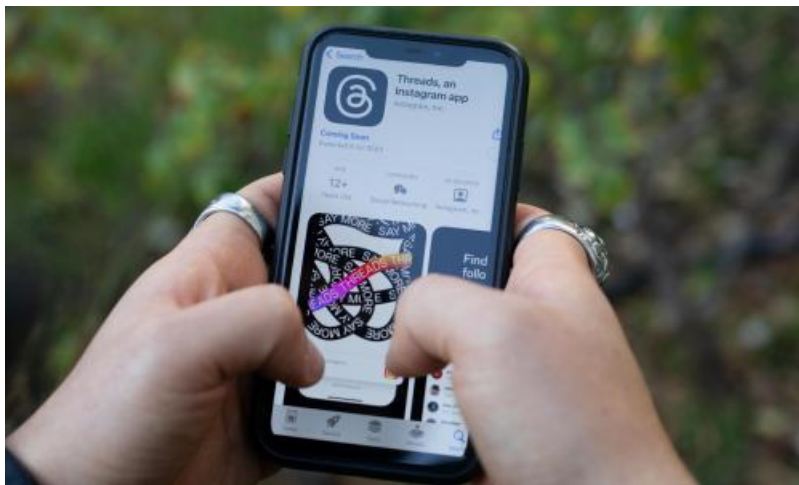
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Meta has launched Threads, a new text-based app to rival Twitter. The move is a bold attempt to lure users away from its floundering competitor with a near-clone of the platform. The Guardian tested out the new social network on Wednesday, minutes after its widely hyped launch. Would it fail to impress, or does it spell real trouble for Elon Musk? Getting started The debut revealed an easy-to-use, intuitive user experience that easily integrates with Instagram. I started by searching “Threads” in the app store, scrolled through some small apps unfortunately also named Threads (RIP to those, inevitably), and clicked on Threads by Meta. The app asked me to connect my Instagram account to sign up, and I switched over from my personal to my professional page – sorry, readers, I will not be revealing my finsta here. Et voilà, I became a Threads user. Threads can only be accessed by integrating an existing Instagram username to sign up – meaning if you don’t have an account, you have to get one to enter the new Threads platform. I was left wondering if I should make a separate Threads account based on my personal Instagram page, but that’s a question for another time. For now, you can follow me at @karipaul_. How it works Threads offers an eerily Twitter-like microblogging experience. Opening the app reveals buttons to like, repost, reply to or quote a “thread”, and counters showing the number of likes and replies that a post has received. Posts are limited to 500 characters, which is more than Twitter’s 280-character threshold, and can include links, photos and videos up to five minutes long. Using Threads felt like a fever dream in which Twitter and Instagram had a more usable brain child. The feed was slick and easy to read, though for now it was populated largely with accounts I did not yet follow or care about – perhaps an issue that will resolve itself as more people sign up. Unlike Twitter, Threads does not seem to use hashtags and does not have a feature that allows users to search for specific text or phrases. It also allows users to share up to 10 photos in a single post – the same limit that exists on Instagram – as opposed to Twitter’s limit of four images. We tested the app from the US, but it’s now live in Apple and Google Android app stores in more than 100 countries including Britain, Australia, Canada and Japan. Some have raised the question of a potential culture clash between Instagram and a Twitter-like service. How will our curated, photo-based lives clash with the freewheeling, meme-heavy and often unhinged world of Twitter? So far, it’s strange, unfamiliar – and kind of fun. So, is it better than Twitter? Meta’s clone of Twitter does feel like, well, using Twitter. The features – likes, retweets, following – are nearly identical to its longstanding microblog predecessor. However, with Twitter getting clunkier and progressively less usable since Musk took it over, opening an app and actually being able to see and engage with content smoothly felt like a breath of fresh air. That is a user experience Meta is betting on, openly stating that the chaos at Twitter has made space for a new product on the market. In an interview

with The Verge, Instagram's head of product, Adam Mosseri, said the company felt that recent "unpredictability" at Twitter had created a need for a new platform. "Obviously, Twitter pioneered the space," Mosseri said. "But just given everything that was going on, we thought there was an opportunity to build something that was open and something that was good for the community that was already using Instagram." As a tech writer who has reported extensively on the privacy concerns surrounding Meta, the company's shameless copying of competitors' apps, and tech's growing unchecked power, it pains me to say that I actually enjoyed using Threads. I already use WhatsApp and Instagram daily, and have a nearly dormant yet still existent Facebook account. Do I really want to share more of my data with one of the largest tech companies in the world? Should we be worried about Meta's growing power? Like many Meta-run products, Threads offers the unsettling experience of integrating almost too well into existing products. Making an account gives you the option to follow your existing circle from Instagram. Your followers will likely receive a notification that you've made an account and posted, encouraging them to do the same. And then there are the longstanding privacy issues. Watchdogs have raised a number of concerns about Threads, as the tech giant seeks to pull even more users into its universe. Threads is able to collect a wide range of personal information, including health, financial, contacts, browsing and search history, location data, purchases and "sensitive info", according to its data privacy disclosure on the App Store. Because of those issues, Threads is not yet available in the European Union, which has strict data privacy rules. The company is working on rolling the app out to more countries, but cites regulatory uncertainty for its decision to hold off on a European launch. Meta has emphasized measures on the new app to keep users safe, including enforcing Instagram's community guidelines and providing tools to control who can mention or reply to users. The Associated Press contributed to this report.