

# Rightwing figures sign up for Meta's Threads app 'within 24 hours' of release

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Mark Zuckerberg, chief executive of Meta, has said he wants to make “kindness” a focus of his company’s new Threads app. Following the launch of the app last week, Zuckerberg hoped to draw a direct contrast to Twitter which, with more than 250 million users, has seen a surge in hate speech and misinformation since Elon Musk took over as CEO. “The goal is to keep it friendly as it expands. I think it’s possible and will ultimately be the key to its success,” Zuckerberg wrote on his Threads account. “That’s one reason why Twitter never succeeded as much as I think it should have, and we want to do it differently.” But rightwing figures are already challenging the app’s content moderation practices, posting hate speech and misinformation. According to research from Media Matters, “within 24 hours of Threads’ release, rightwing and fringe figures signed up for the platform”, including white nationalist Richard Spencer, the former Breitbart writer, and white supremacists such as Nick Fuentes, an outspoken antisemite. Fuentes, who has been suspended from Instagram since 2019, announced in a 6 July live stream: “I signed up for it last night. I made a fake Instagram. I got on a fake Thread.” He encouraged his followers to “try and build a big account. I mean, if you get in early, maybe some of you guys can blow up and red pill some people on there.” Reuters reported seeing accounts posting about the Illuminati and “billionaire satanists”, while other users compared each other to Nazis and battled over everything from gender identity to violence in the West Bank. Threads, a free app, is linked to Instagram and users are required to have an Instagram account to sign in. As such, the terms of use and community guidelines that govern Instagram apply to Threads. According to Instagram’s community guidelines, it is “not a place to support or praise terrorism, organized crime or hate groups”. The rules also promise to “remove content that contains credible threats or hate speech” and “content that targets private individuals to degrade or shame them”. But like other social media platforms, Instagram has struggled to control hate speech and misinformation on the app, according to Media Matters. Last month, the platform faced criticism for reinstating the account of the misinformation super-spreader Robert F Kennedy Jr and lifted the ban on Donald Trump’s account. Meta has said it would hold users of the new Threads app to the same rules it maintains on its photo and video sharing social media service, Instagram, and already appears to be relying on that existing infrastructure. When a user attempts to follow accounts that have been flagged for spreading misinformation in the past, for instance, Threads, like Instagram, shows a warning asking if they are sure. “Our industry-leading integrity enforcement tools and human review are wired into Threads. Like all of our apps, hate speech policies apply,” said a Meta spokesperson. “Additionally, we match misinformation ratings from independent factcheckers to content across our other apps, including Threads. We are considering additional ways to address misinformation in future updates.” Rightwing accounts are appearing to test the app’s policies by posting hate speech and misinformation to Threads. Alt-right

political activist Jack Posobiec made several posts insulting transgender people and immigrants and falsely claiming, "The 2020 election was rigged and everyone knows it". Some were hoping to be banned as though it were a badge of honor. Rightwing livestreamer Sneako posted: "I kinda want the first ban on Threads trophy." While rightwing influencer Bo Dittle posted: "I'm gonna use this app to talk about a bunch of things I would never put on Instagram. Let the drama begin." A number of far-right news outlets have also joined the app, with verified accounts for Breitbart News and the Gateway Pundit among them, but have not yet posted much. "We're already seeing plenty of high-profile accounts that have been known to spread harmful and misleading content," said Melanie Smith, head of research for the Institute for Strategic Dialogue's US arm, to Bloomberg News. The Threads account for War Room, a show on Real America's Voice TV run by former Trump adviser Steve Bannon shared a clip on Thursday featuring Naomi Wolf, who accused a prominent pharmaceutical company of committing fraud when it sought emergency authorization for its Covid-19 vaccine. Content moderation problems that have plagued other platforms "will certainly strike Threads over time", said Alexandra Popken, Twitter's former head of trust and safety operations. "I see brands like Slim Jim trying to be funny. I see influencers who I follow on Instagram and people who I care about in my life," she told the Associated Press. "There's like this period of time where the bad actors haven't found it yet. It's like this non-toxic, happy corner of the internet." Smith, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue researcher, urges users to exercise caution. "This is a social media app that is owned by Meta, who have failed consistently in governing and moderating other platforms they own," she told Bloomberg.