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Should academics quit Twitter and join Threads instead?

Experts weight in on whether the Meta-owned app, which has soared in popularity since its launch, could ever replace Twitter, or X, among scholars

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Patrick Jack

Twitter: [@paddywjack](#)

While Elon Musk's tumultuous Twitter takeover has resulted in the mass sacking of thousands of staff, accusations of a rise in hate speech and a dubious rebrand, it is not yet known what the long-term impact will be on so-called "academic Twitter". Reports have suggested that Twitter – or X, as its new owner seemingly wants it to be called – has lost users since Mr Musk acquired it last year, while new rival Threads has soared in popularity, thanks to its reliance on Meta networks.

And though this is a great idea for general audiences, it is a poor fit for academics, according to Mark Carrigan, a lecturer in education at the University of Manchester. Dr Carrigan said interactions with Instagram friends will be very different from those with Twitter followers – which academics tended to treat as a "professional network, albeit with porous boundaries".

In addition, he warned that [the Mark Zuckerberg-owned app's vastly more sophisticated advertising](#) and surveillance apparatus will likely put off many researchers.

Twitter was so useful for academics because of the open nature of the platform's networks, said Dr Carrigan, who is also programme director for digital technologies, communication and education at Manchester.

"Combined with the brevity of the medium, which suited time-pressed people who like writing, it was a great fit for academics in the 2010s when the real implications of digital media were starting to be felt within the academy," he said.

Though Threads has gained immediate attention, interest in it – as for previous possible alternatives – will wane when it becomes clear that academic networks will not relocate to it, Dr Carrigan added.

"We should probably recognise that what many experienced as a golden age of Twitter was a passing phase which probably can't be reproduced elsewhere."

A recent price increase means that many researchers have reported being unable to use [the site's API](#), which was key for academic papers. And dashboard tool TweetDeck will soon be restricted to those willing to fork out for a premium subscription.

Andy Tattersall, an information specialist at the Sheffield Centre of Health and Related Research (SCHARR), said rival Threads felt "rushed" in its current form, and

the lack of a desktop version limits use, as not everyone wants to be tied to their phone in a typical academic working day.

But Mr Tattersall said it does have some [advantages over the current iteration of Twitter](#).

“The interface is rather simple, which might chime with some academics harking back to the earlier days of Twitter, and it does allow for longer posts,” he said.

“Threads has promised more, and one such feature is to bring you content from accounts you actually want to see, something Twitter has really failed in over the last couple of years.”

Mr Tattersall said [academics had been leaving Twitter for some time](#), but Mr Musk’s acquisition, and his relaxed approach to combatting misinformation on the platform, was the last straw for many more.

“That said, I do still see academics joining the platform and engaging with it in certain fields,” he added.

“I totally understand why many have left; for some it has become a very dangerous place. But I also fear that giving up the social media platforms to extreme and conspiratorial views removes evidenced-based experts from any conversation.”

Threads reached more than 100 million users within just days of its launch [but has struggled to retain this growth](#).

Despite their differences, Christian Fuchs, professor of media systems and media organisation at [Paderborn University](#), said both Threads and Twitter had the same fundamental flaw.

“Meta/Facebook’s platforms and Twitter are based on the same business model, namely targeted advertising,” he added.

“Meta’s platforms have been involved in quite a lot of scandals, such as Cambridge Analytica, that have been enabled by online advertising.

“The problem is that the digital ad business model has endangered democracy.”

patrick.jack@timeshighereducation.com