# Instagram's Reels could become a standalone app as part of Project Ray



Rumours are surfacing that Instagram's short-form video feature, Reels, may be transitioning into a standalone app, separate from its parent platform. This information comes from Adam Mosseri, the U.S. Head of Instagram, who was reportedly overheard discussing the potential app during a private conversation, according to The Information. This development falls under Instagram’s broader initiative known as Project Ray, which aims to enhance Instagram’s competitive edge against TikTok, the popular short-form video platform.

The trend towards short-form videos has gained significant traction, particularly catalysed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Users gravitated towards platforms offering brief, engaging videos as a means to find emotionally rewarding entertainment amidst the isolation of quarantine. As highlighted in Dr. Gloria Mark’s book “Attention Span: A Groundbreaking Way to Restore Balance, Happiness, and Productivity,” the average human attention span on screen is now estimated to be just 47 seconds, mirroring the burgeoning popularity of such short videos.

Instagram initially attempted to adapt to this shifting media landscape by launching Reels, a feature resembling TikTok’s core offerings. However, internal research within Instagram showed that users have been distancing themselves from the heavily curated aesthetics that defined the platform before this shift, noting a correlation between these aesthetics and feelings of anxiety and negative body image.

Yet, as the competition in the short-form content space intensifies, doubts linger over whether a standalone Reels app would flourish. Critics suggest that the app may struggle due to a fundamental mismatch in user intent. Users typically engage with Instagram for its curated photo experience, whereas Reels, aiming to replicate TikTok's success, lacks the same focus. Reports indicate that about 37% of users engage with Reels passively, often stumbling upon content through what can be perceived as abrupt placements in their feeds.

The potential divide between the two formats raises concerns that separating Reels from Instagram could hinder its ability to maintain user engagement, as it would lose the passive viewership that arises from being part of a larger ecosystem over time. The app’s identity may face challenges in breaking away from Instagram’s established reputation, which centres on perfected visuals.

While Meta, Instagram's parent company, has successfully adopted features from competitors in the past, such as introducing Stories to rival Snapchat and attempting to capture short-form text discussions from platforms like X (formerly Twitter), its recent attempts to dominate the short-form video market have been less than successful. The launch of Threads, a text-based alternative to X, initially gained rapid user engagement but failed to sustain this momentum due to a lack of distinctive features.

Instagram's prior ventures into the video domain, including Lasso and IGTV, met similar fates—each falling short of capturing a significant user base and ultimately being discontinued. Presently, Reels operates within Instagram, one of the most widely used social media platforms globally, yet still struggles to match TikTok's popularity.

The proposition of Reels as its own entity may also clash with the prevailing trend of app fatigue among consumers. As noted by eMarketer, most users delete an app within 5.8 days of last use, posing a significant hurdle for Reels as it competes in an already saturated mobile application market. Users might be reluctant to download yet another app offering similar content to platforms they are already accustomed to, further complicating the standalone app’s prospects.

The timing of the potential launch is intriguing, particularly as TikTok faces increasing scrutiny in the United States. In January 2025, a proposed ban on TikTok elicited a surge of downloads for alternative apps like Rednote, which quickly became the top downloaded app, demonstrating users' inclination toward new offerings rather than turning to Reels for content. Even when TikTok returned, usage of Rednote sharply declined.

The challenges Reels face in carving out a distinct identity are underscored by user observations, such as a Reddit user who commented on the prevalence of recycled TikTok content on Reels, suggesting that without unique offerings, Reels may not establish a loyal user base.

As user behaviours evolve, so too must the platforms that cater to them. Instagram's deliberation over Reels' future poses critical questions about the viability of transforming a supplementary feature into a leading app. The ultimate success of a standalone Reels may hinge upon its ability to cultivate a unique identity and deliver engaging content that resonates with users beyond the current trends dominating the social media landscape.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://techcrunch.com/2025/02/27/instagram-may-spin-off-reels-into-a-separate-app/> - TechCrunch reports that Meta is mulling over launching a standalone app for Reels, aligning with the broader strategy to enhance Instagram’s competitive edge against TikTok.
3. <https://www.cnet.com/tech/services-and-software/instagram-may-spin-off-reels-as-a-standalone-app-report-says/> - CNET discusses the potential spin-off of Reels into a separate app as part of Project Ray, aiming to improve content recommendations and enhance support for longer videos to compete with TikTok.
4. <https://www.mindshareworld.com/austria/news/weekly-prompt-instagram-eyes-standalone-reels-app-and-other-news> - This article mentions that Instagram might launch a separate app for Reels under Project Ray, focusing on improving content recommendations and expanding video length, a strategy similar to TikTok.
5. <https://www.emarketer.com/content/social-medianomics> - eMarketer provides insights into app usage patterns, supporting the notion that users tend to delete apps within a short period of not using them, which poses a challenge for a standalone Reels app.
6. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.635493/full> - Although not directly related to Reels, research on human attention span supports the popularity of short-form videos during the pandemic, a trend that Reels and similar platforms capitalize on.
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