PRODUCT TEARDOWN

Instagram product teardown

How does Instagram keep friends visible as Reels takes over?

Existing product · Lens: friends' content · Data: Meta Q2 2026 call and Sensor Tower estimates

01 · PRODUCT

An existing app used by 2 billion people a day

Instagram is Meta's photo, video and messaging app: Feed, Stories, Reels and DMs. It earns mainly from advertising.

Why Instagram

2 billion daily users, and part of the 3.6 billion people who use a Meta app daily.

Why the friends lens

Reels is about half of US time and ad slots, and Instagram has been through this tension before.

WHY IT MATTERS

51%

of US Instagram time is now spent on Reels.

Up 6 points in a year, and over half of ad slots too. A directional estimate, not a Meta figure.

02 · SCALE

Big, growing and leaning on video

2B
daily users, Q2 2026

3.6B
people use a Meta app daily

+12%
US time spent, per a secondary report

50%+
of Instagram ad slots are Reels (US)

+8%
ads per session in the US

-5%
Facebook and Instagram downloads

Who competes, and how Instagram earns

Competitors

TikTok and YouTube Shorts for video

Snapchat for close friends

WhatsApp and iMessage for chat

Named, not measured.

Revenue sources

Advertising across Feed, Stories and Reels

Meta ads: $59.4B, up 27% (all apps)

Business agents being rolled out

Instagram revenue is not broken out.

03 · PROBLEM

Video is winning the feed

Recommended video is taking the largest share of Instagram's time and ad slots, while friends' content has less room to be seen.

HOW MIGHT WE

keep friends' posts easy to find without cutting the Reels engine?

04 · USERS

Four users, one to serve first

SERVE FIRST · 19 OF 20

Friends-First User

Opens the app to see friends and family.

SECOND · 16 OF 20

Creator

Posts for reach; cares how many followers see it.

THIRD · 14 OF 20

Small Business Owner

Sells through Instagram and its DMs.

LATER · 13 OF 20

Teen

13 to 17 under Teen Accounts, PG-13 defaults.

Scored on size, headroom, fit with the fix and strategic value (my judgement, to validate with interviews).

05 · JOURNEY

The friends view is one tap away, if you know

Stage	What happens	Feeling	Opportunity
Open	Opens to see what friends are up to	Curious	Open to what they came for
Scroll	Feed mixes friends, suggestions, ads	Hunting for friends	Make friends easy to spot
Switch	Taps Following or Favorites, if known	Relief, or never finds it	Surface the option
Drift	Reels takes over the session	Time passes	Keep a clear friends view
Leave	Closes the app	Satisfied or empty	End on something personal

Five pain points, two to fix first

#	Pain point	Evidence	Score
1	Friends' posts hard to find	Reels 51% of US time; 2022 backlash	16
4	Friends-only view not the default	2022 limit; not re-checked	15
2	Recommendations drift	Algorithm reset announced (Nov 2024)	13
3	More ads per session	Up 8% in the US (directional)	12
5	Creator reach unpredictable	My inference; no data read	8

Score out of 20 on reach, severity, evidence and fixability (my judgement).

Five ideas to keep friends visible

A
Open-to-Favorites setting
Choose Favorites or Following as the screen the app opens to

B
Close-friends digest
A daily card summarising what close friends posted

C
Friends-versus-recommended slider
Set how much of Feed comes from accounts you follow

D
Friends-first ad cap
Fewer ads in sessions that start in Favorites

E
Creator reach explainer
Tell creators how posts are distributed

08 · PRIORITIZATION

Open-to-Favorites ranks first on RICE

Rank	Solution	Reach	Impact	Confidence	Effort	RICE
1	A. Open-to-Favorites	30	1	0.6	1	18
2	B. Close-friends digest	60	1	0.4	3	8
2	C. Friends vs recommended slider	40	1	0.5	2.5	8
4	D. Friends-first ad cap	70	0.5	0.4	2	7
5	E. Creator reach explainer	10	1	0.4	3	1.3

RICE = (Reach × Impact × Confidence) ÷ Effort. Reach is percent of daily users. All inputs are illustrative estimates.

09 · MVP

MVP: choose where Instagram opens

A setting, Open Instagram to: Home, Following or Favorites, shown once to people who already use those feeds weekly.

More
friends-first sessions per week

Flat
time spent, ads and creator reach

50/50
A/B test

10 · TEST

A 50/50 A/B test

Item	Definition
Hypothesis	An easy friends-first start raises satisfaction without losing time spent
Success	Treated users keep a friends-first start for 4 weeks and visit more often
Guardrails	Total time spent, Reels views, ad impressions per user, creator reach
Stop rule	End the test if time spent or ad impressions fall below an agreed margin against control

Four gated phases

Phase	What happens	Gate
1. Pilot	Small share of weekly Following and Favorites users	No drop in time spent
2. Expand	All weekly users of those feeds	Lift in friends-first sessions, guardrails flat
3. Launch	Offer in Settings for everyone	Stable ads and creator reach
4. Iterate	Test the close-friends digest on top	Each change wins its own test

Existing users only, so there is no paid acquisition. Channels: a one-time in-app prompt and Settings.

12 · RISKS

What could go wrong

Hurts Reels time

Reels drives time spent and ads. Roll out in stages and watch the guardrails.

Hurts creators

Fewer Reels views cut creator reach. Track views per post and pause if it drops.

Already tried

The 2022 limit may exist for a reason. Check why before building.

TAKEAWAYS

Three things to remember

1. Instagram has 2B daily users, and Reels is about half of US time and ad slots.
2. Whether friends' posts are crowded out today is a hypothesis, not a finding.
3. Test an open-to-Favorites setting first, with time spent, ads and creator reach as guardrails.

Would you open Instagram to your friends first?

SOURCES

Sources and caveats

Sources

Nasdaq summary of Meta Q2 2026 call

PPC Land citing Sensor Tower (Aug 2026)

Social Samosa; MediaPost; TechCrunch; afaqs

Crypto Briefing citing The Verge

Caveats

Sensor Tower figures are US-only estimates

Instagram revenue and share not reported

Scores are my own estimates

Thank you

Questions and feedback welcome