TOPICAL WEBINAR FOR APA MEMBERS

An Educational Resource from American Professional Agency

Online Presence, Offline Impact:

Social Media Risks for Psychologists

October 16, 2026

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- You are on mute. Communicate using the **Q&A box** in the webinar screen. Submit your questions for our speakers using the Q&A box.
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Objectives

Examine ways to engage with patients and the community on social media

Identify risks and challenges of using social media

Review best practices and risk management strategies to manage and protect your professional reputation on social media platforms

Engage with Patients and the Community on Social Media

Background

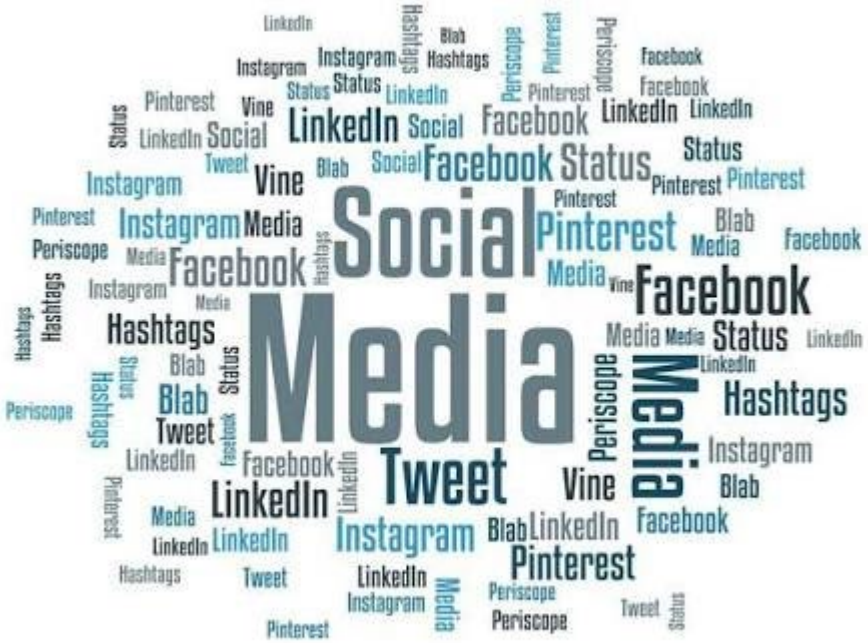
Social media is deeply integrated into personal and professional lives. This shift brings new opportunities and risks for psychologists and their patients. Navigating these challenges requires evolving ethical and professional strategies in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

What is Social Media?

"forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content ."

Source: Merriam-Webster. Accessed June 2024.

https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20media



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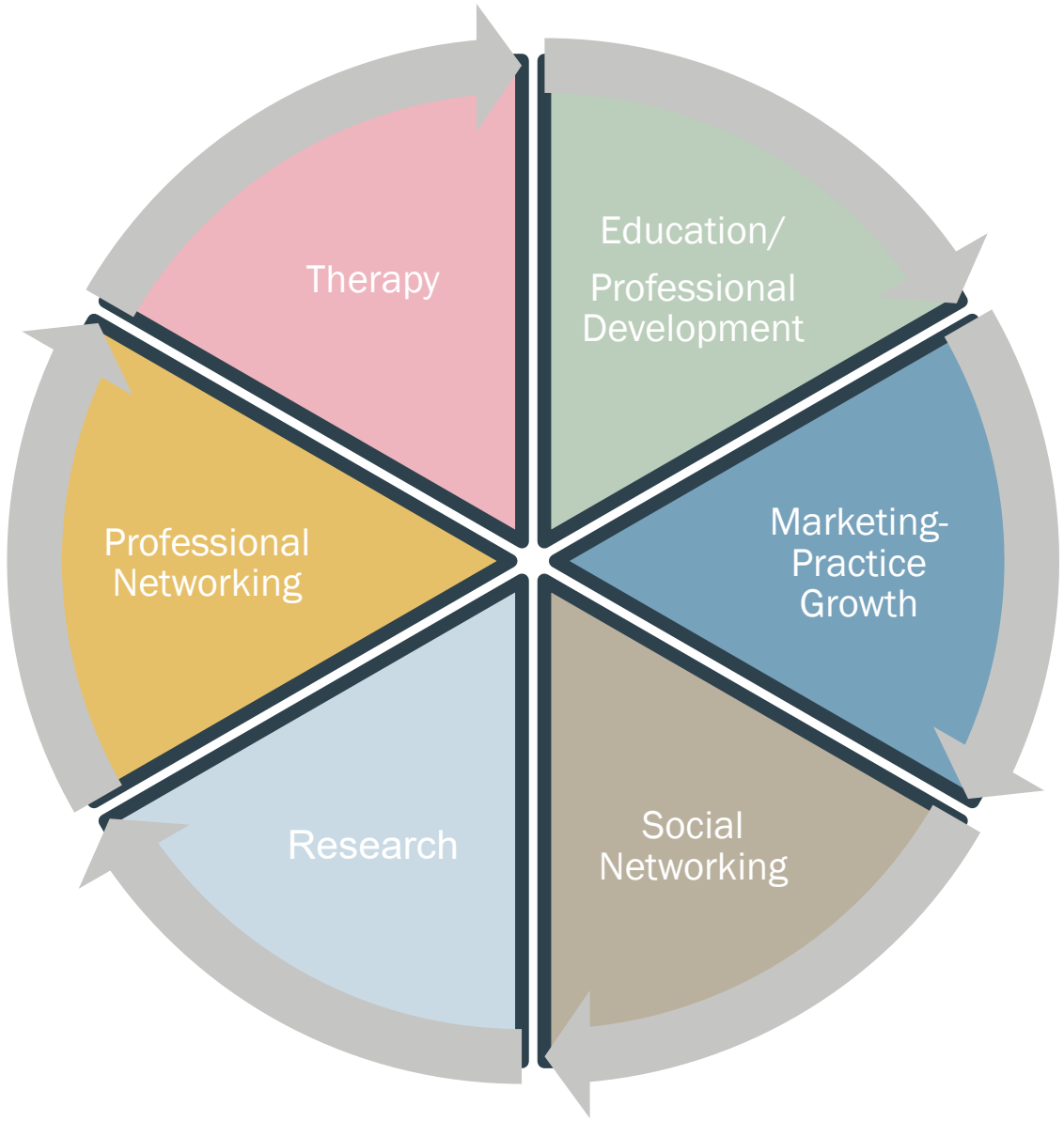
Social Media is One of the Most Powerful Online Platforms

- Massive Global Usage
- Meta Platform Dominance
- Short Video Content- Most Engaging
- Discovery Pathways

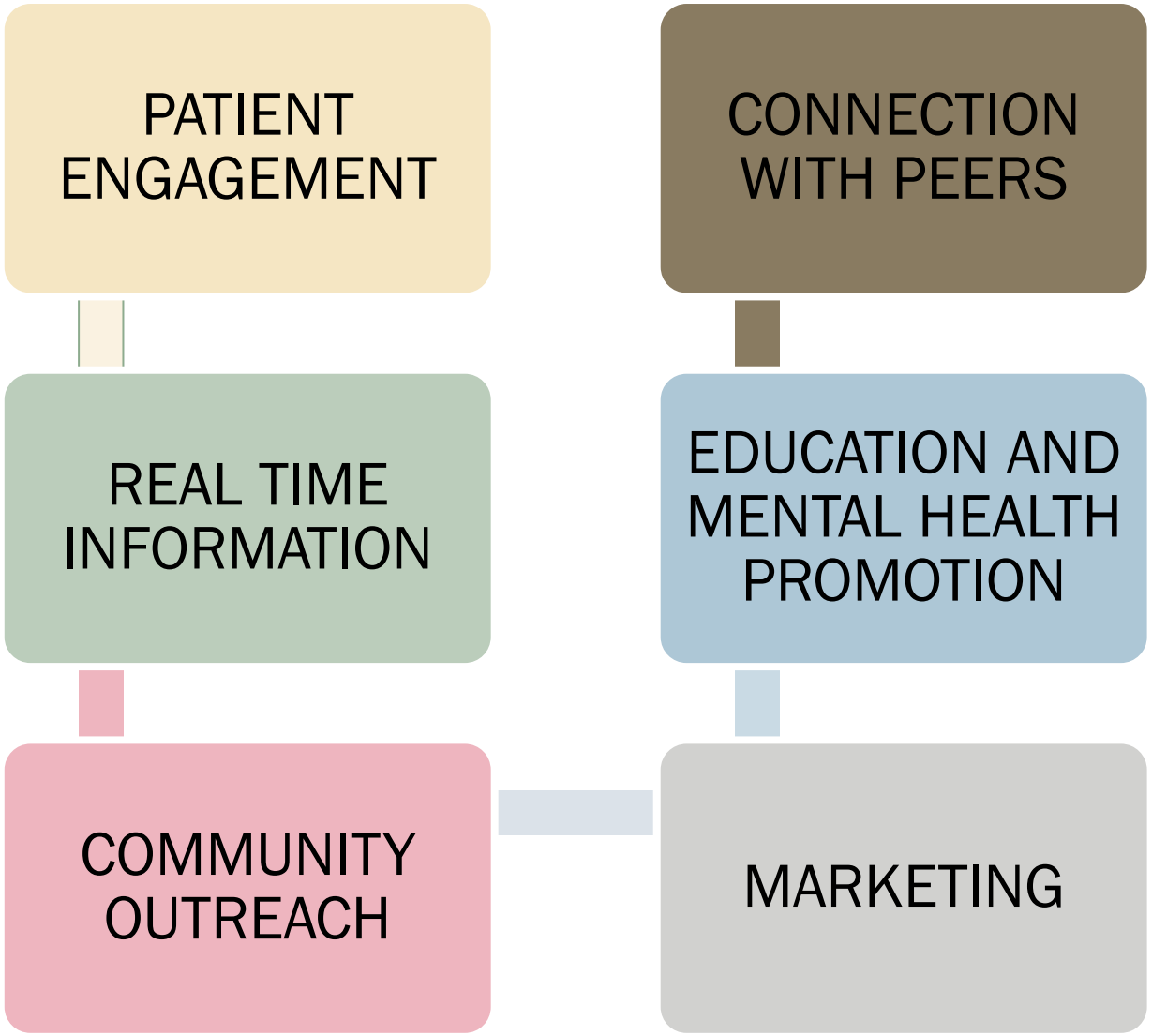
Source: Forbes. Top Social Media Statistics and Trends. August 2026. https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/social-media-statistics/

Common Uses of Social Media

- Social & Professional Networking
- Connection
- News and Information
- Entertainment
- Marketing & Promotion
- Education/Advocacy Awareness
- Research



Uses of Social Media in Psychology Practice – Provider Focused



Benefits of Using Social Media in Psychology

How Has Social Media Changed Therapy

Patient Engagement

Communication

Education

Feedback & Reviews

Mental Health/Wellness Apps

Identify Risks and Challenges of Using Social Media

Why Social Media Etiquette Matters

PATIENT PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

BOUNDARIES

CREDIBILITY OF INFORMATION

REPUTATION

Risks Associated with Engagement in Social Media as a Psychologist

- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Reputational Harm
- Ethical Dilemmas
- Boundaries
- Cyber Security
- Regulatory Compliance
- Professional conduct violation
- Legal
- Unreliable Information

B. Brandon Au, DDS, Inc.

- December 14, 2022
- Dentist - Impermissible disclosure of PHI in response to an online review
- Fine - $23,000

Source: US Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, Health Information Privacy. HHS Civil Rights Office Enters Settlement with Dental Practice Over Disclosures of Patients' Protected Health Information. December 14, 2022. https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/compliance-enforcement/agreements/new-vision/index.html

Manasa Health Center, LLC

- June 5, 2023
- New Jersey provider of adult and child psychiatric services. Manasa Health Center impermissibly disclosed the protected health information of a patient when the entity posted a response to the patient's negative online review.
- Fine $30,000

Source: US Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, Health Information Privacy. Health Care Provider in New Jersey That Disclosed Patient Information in Response To Negative Online Reviews. June 5, 2023. https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/compliance-enforcement/agreements/manasa/index.html

Cadia Healthcare Facilities

- September 30, 2025
- Long Term Care – Complaint alleged impermissible disclosed of a patient's name, photograph and information pertaining to the patient's conditions, treatment, and recovery in the form of a "success story" posted to Cadia Healthcare Facilities' website.
- Investigation revealed disclosure of 150 other patients listed on their website as "success stories"
- Fine - $182,000

Source: US Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights. HHS' Office For Civil Rights Settles HIPAA Investigation Of Cadia Healthcare Facilities For Disclosure of Patients' Protected Health Information. September 30, 2025. https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/ocr-settles-hipaa-with-cadia-healthcare-facilities.html

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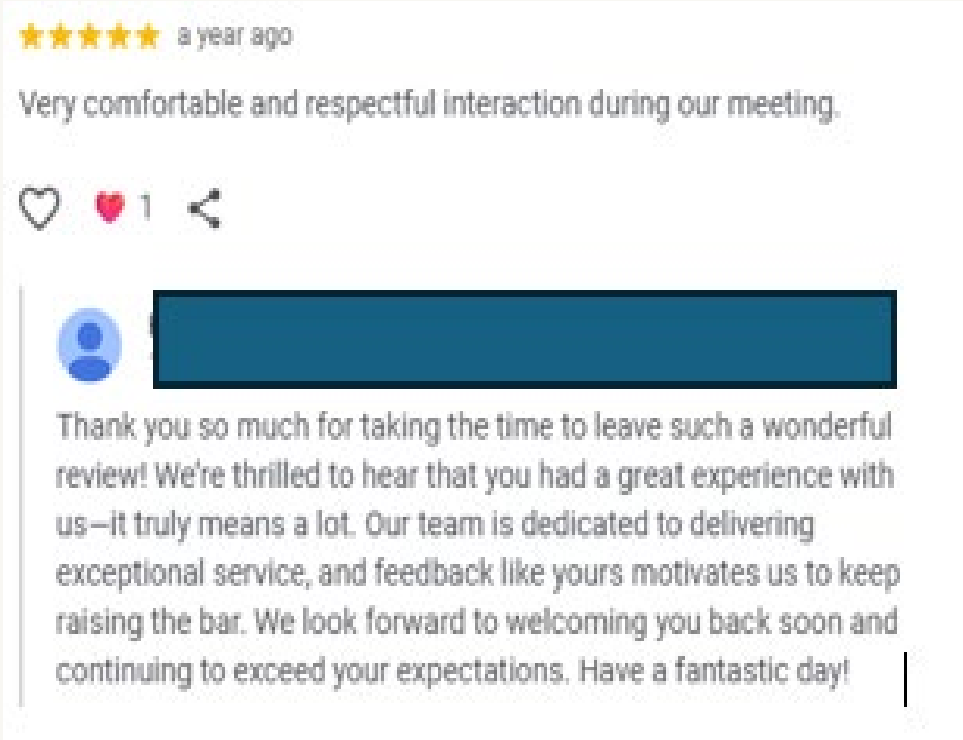
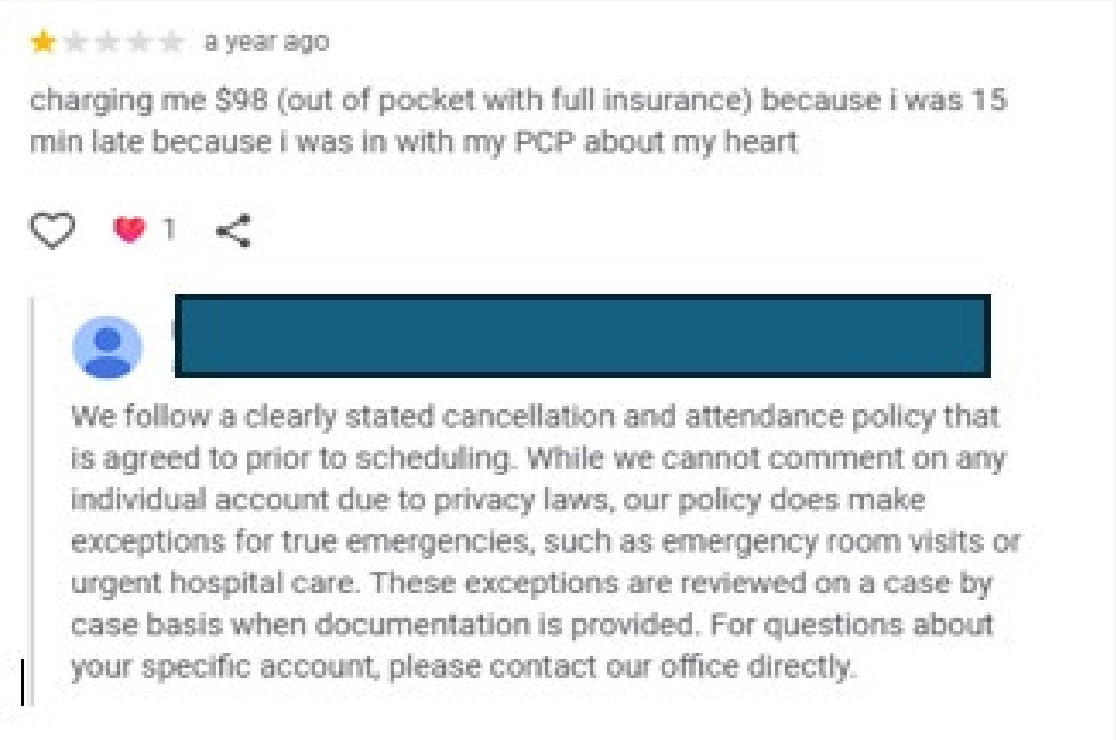
Polling Question

Does your organization or practice monitor reviews and is there a process for managing responses to reviews?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not Sure

CUSTOMER REVIEW EXAMPLES





Source: https://www.google.com/search?q

Questions to Consider

- What is the purpose of the online post? Are there benefits?
- How will the message be received by the social media audience?
- How is confidentiality maintained?
- What is the limit for self-disclosure

Questions to Consider

- How do you separate your professional and personal social media space?
- What does E-ethics look like?
- Does an online presence impact your professional career?

Review Best Practices and Risk Management Strategies

Legal and Risk Management Considerations

- Privacy and Security
- Standard of Care
- Staff Education
- Informed Consent
- Marketing and Brand Product Promotion

Legal and Risk Management Considerations

- Reliability of Information
- Management of Social Media Presence
- Professional Boundaries
- Employment Laws

Medical Malpractice Defenses

- No Provider / Patient Relationship Established
- Clear Consent
- HIPAA/Confidentiality Compliance
- Professional Ethics Followed
- Professional Boundaries Maintained
- Avoidance of a Dual Relationship
- General Content, Not Patient Specific
- Proper Privacy Settings
- Immediate Remediation
- Documentation

Risk Management Review

Be Aware of State and Federal Confidentiality Laws

Create a Social Media Policy

Adhere to the APA Code of Ethics

Educate Staff on Appropriate Use of Social Media

Obtain Informed Consent

Maintain Professional Boundaries

Risk Management Review

Monitor Online Presence

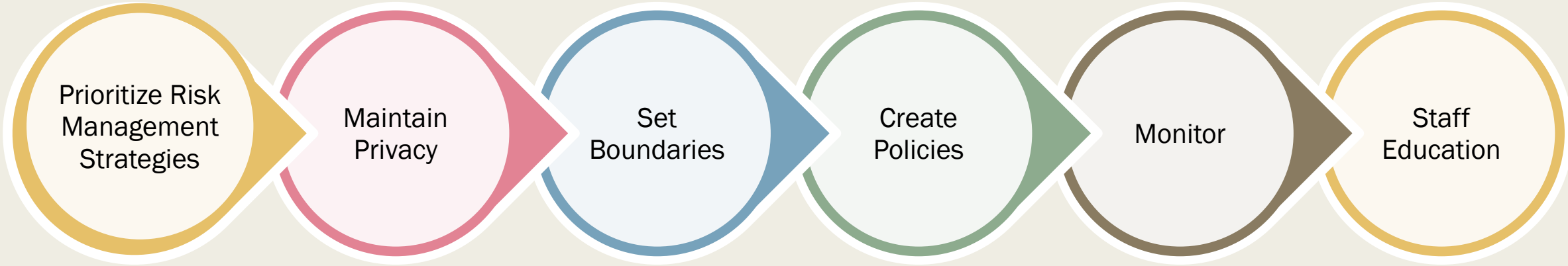
Maintain Separate Personal and Professional Online Accounts

Maintain Robust Cyber Security

Understand Cover Under Professional Liability Coverage

Consider Purchasing Cyber Liability Insurance

In Summary


Prioritize Risk Management Strategies
Maintain Privacy
Set Boundaries
Create Policies
Monitor
Staff Education

Resources

- American Psychological Association. APA Committee on Professional Practice and Standards. “APA Guidelines for the Optimal Use of Social Media in Professional Psychological Practice”. October 2021. https://www.apa.org/about/policy/guidelines-optimal-use-social-media.pdf
- National Library of Medicine. National Center for Biotechnology Information. “What I share is not the same as therapy: Psychologist experiences of Instagram use as a mental health influencer”. February 21, 2025. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12346246/
- American Psychological Association. Anna Medaris. “Ethical gray areas, trolls, and more: Ways to create trustworthy social media content.” April 1, 2024. Vol. 55 No. 3.

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AUDIENCE Q&A

FINAL THOUGHTS

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- Take our survey immediately after the webinar has concluded.

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