



the british
psychological society
promoting excellence in psychology

Guidance on the use of social media

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This guidance was created by
the Member Board Social Media
Guidance Task and Finish Group.



1. Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to support members to use social media appropriately. The guidance covers the use of social media networks, such as Twitter and Facebook, and includes activities such as posting content, interacting with others, and sharing content created by others.

Social media has many benefits. It presents a great opportunity to promote your activities and the work of your network or the BPS, to connect with your community, other members (or future members), agencies, charities or other stakeholders, and to share the work of the society and its members with a wider audience, draw on new ideas and have valuable discussions.

These benefits come with a responsibility. At all times, there is a need for members to use their professional and ethical judgement and this is no different in the digital space.

As set out in the Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct, members are likely to need to make decisions in difficult, changing and unclear situations. In the social media context, this might mean making decisions in the light of new or incomplete information, in contentious areas of debate, and with a broad audience. The Society's Member Conduct Rules require that members use the Code to form a basis for the consideration of ethical questions, with the principles of the code – respect, competence, responsibility, and integrity – being taken into account in the process of making decisions. You are expected to be able to justify your own professional and ethical judgement in specific circumstances, making sound judgements based on your situation and competences, and this guidance seeks to inform that decision-making. This guidance is provided to help you maintain a professional presence when using social media and to foster a valuable online experience for all.

For those members who are posting on behalf of the Society, for example for a network, this guidance also reflects the expectations of the Code of Conduct for Members Undertaking Activities on behalf of the Society.

2. Guidance across all activities

You

- Be mindful that whether you identify yourself as a psychologist or not on your profile, you should act responsibly at all times and uphold the reputation of the profession. You have a level of authority and you represent psychology and the psychological professions.
- Ensure that you have competence in the use of the particular technology and the social media platforms being employed.
- It is your responsibility to anticipate risks, such as those highlighted in this guidance, and mitigate for them when choosing whether and what to post.

Your audience

- Be aware of privacy settings and the potential for information to be shared beyond your original intended audience.
- Consider that the audience for your activity may be wider than you initially intend and you should conduct yourself as appropriate to your role.
- Consider the ways in which information may be received and interpreted by audiences with varying levels of knowledge about psychology and its practice.
- If you're tagging another account into your posts – visit the page and make sure they are really who you meant to include as there are lots of fan/impersonation/unofficial accounts.
- Always check who someone is before responding directly. For example, it may not always be obvious if you are being approached by a blogger or journalist, in which case you should refer them to the BPS communications team if they are seeking a formal BPS position.

Your activity

- Do not discuss confidential issues in any non-secure medium.
- Ensure accuracy of your activity at the time of posting, and take responsibility to update potentially misleading information where possible.
- Social media content can be permanent: once something is posted online, it's very difficult to remove it and it remains traceable even if you seem to be able to delete it.
- Members can play an active part in social media. However, this doesn't mean there is a need to answer all queries and questions directed to you via social media.
- Do not post defamatory comments about individuals or institutions. Defamation law can apply to any text-based or verbal content posted online, irrespective of whether they are made in a personal or professional capacity.
- Remember that you have the option of blocking or muting others.
- Be aware that social media can have a disinhibiting effect and you should carefully consider whether you would deem particular content appropriate were it communicated in another environment.

3. Language and tone

Social media is a fast-moving and informal environment, and within this context as much as any other we seek to encourage an observation of the norms of professional integrity. In debating issues of relevance to psychology, all members have the skills required to engage in respectful and robust debate without resorting to poor practice.

Accordingly, the following guidance should be noted:

- **Tone:** the tone of debate should be respectful, and mindful of the dignity of others, and you should not be dismissive or mocking of others' views, or aggressive; as a member we would expect you to be aiming to promote evidence-based ideas and be respectful of those who hold other views.
- **Independence:** you should avoid subjective or emotive language in debate and discussion.
- **Respect:** you should avoid using discriminatory language (e.g. language that stereotypes groups of people or could foster prejudice or hatred), and you should consider how your choice of terminology might be received (e.g. whether it may be an outdated term).
- You should be aware of the nature of social media and be careful to avoid misleading others, posting inflammatory content, or aggravating conflict.

In addition, you should seek to avoid the following poor practice:

- Factual inaccuracy
- Unfounded assertions
- False equivalence
- False logic
- Misrepresentation of data or evidence
- Selective presentation of evidence
- Repetition without development of the argument

Members are strongly encouraged to take extra caution to avoid using language that is potentially libellous or which damages or has the potential to damage the standing of psychology, or the psychological professions. Equally, you should ensure that all psychologists and associated professions are respected equally for their professional knowledge and skills.

4. Privacy

Educate yourself on the specific social media platform that you are using, or intending to use, to ensure that you are aware of the correct settings to ensure your own privacy, and that of your family and friends, work colleagues, clients, stakeholders, etc. Be aware that social networking sites frequently update their services and privacy settings can be reset to a default that deletes your personalised settings, so ensure that you regularly check your privacy settings.

Keep your professional and private life as separate as possible. Your professional profile and presence may include personal information that is relevant to your work, but your private life covers matters that you would choose not to share in the professional sphere. Consider maintaining separate accounts for a private and a professional presence.

Be mindful of any apps that you connect to social media platforms, as they do not always have the same privacy capabilities to store your data securely. If you wouldn't want something to be seen by a wider group of people/the public, then think again before sharing it on social media.

Remember that images posted online by family (for example, your children) or friends, may be accessible as they may set their privacy settings differently to how you have set yours.

5. Professional capacity

Any interactions with clients, service users, trainees, students, or others with whom you work on a professional basis should remain strictly professional. Within this, be careful to keep your professional assertions to matters that are within your scope of competence, and mind how you present your expertise to the varied audience that social media includes.

Whilst recognising that clients or similar may follow you on social media, you should avoid connecting on social media with current or past service users, clients, current students etc. where there is a risk of blurring the boundaries of a professional relationship. If you are still working with them, you can let them know the reasons why in a face-to-face setting, or send them an email to politely decline engagement, explaining that it is not appropriate to accept.

If you manage a social media presence that is not providing client services, but is instead active in advocating or educating on psychological matters, then interacting with users can be appropriate, ensuring that professional boundaries are maintained and the risks of engaging in multiple relationships through multiple social media presences are considered.

You should consider issues of consent before publishing any information relating to colleagues, clients or service users, including media (e.g. images or videos) and any materials that are produced as a result of your interactions, without getting an appropriate record of approval from those involved, and ensuring that any relevant ethics and social media policies are adhered to (e.g. the service's own social media guidance).

You should not post direct, or indirect references regarding clients, or make disparaging comments about colleagues or client groups.

6. Complaints

Social media is not usually appropriate for whistle-blowing or raising concerns publicly where there are other channels for this which are intended to reach the people who can respond to your concerns. Consider that anything you post may reach a much larger audience and escalate beyond your original intention causing unwarranted emotional and reputational damage. Please refer to the guidelines within your work setting, or, if you have a concern about a member of the Society, please contact us via: complaints@bps.org.uk and we will advise you on appropriate actions that can be taken or signpost you to the appropriate body, such as the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

Guidelines specifically relevant when using BPS social media accounts

BPS social media accounts are intended to enable networks to reaching new and existing members to promote its activities within and beyond the Society.

A BPS account is seen to represent the Society and network-specific statements should be aligned with the network strategy. Requests for a Society policy statement should be referred to the BPS Communications team to respond. Please acknowledge this in any communication with people seeking a statement (e.g. 'Thank you for your query. Please be aware that it is BPS policy that any official statements are obtained from the BPS centrally @BPSOfficial').

Across all BPS social media accounts, you should ensure that:

- appropriate copyright permissions/consent have been sought before using any material (e.g. photographs, videos, exhibits);
- content adheres to Digital Accessibility Laws, such as using Alternative Text for multimedia content;
- only BPS-approved logos are used in the cover and profile image photos.

BPS-branded social media accounts should not be used to

- promote a member's own agenda or views;
- advertise activities that are primarily for profit or for members' commercial gain;
- advocate for causes beyond the network's specific remit.

Members who are responsible for a BPS social media account are advised to discuss their strategy with the BPS communications team to ensure alignment and appropriate support.

Consult other guidance available to you

Additional [Ethics guidelines for internet-mediated research](#) are available from the Society.

You should also refer to the relevant policies and guidelines available within your specific work setting, as well as those of any other regulatory or professional bodies to which you belong. If there are none, you might raise this with the relevant institution or consider developing your own.



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