



**Federal Trade Commission  
Privacy Impact Assessment**

**Instagram**

**July 2024**

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC or Commission) has prepared this Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) to analyze and explain how the FTC handles personally identifiable information (PII)<sup>1</sup> about individuals that may be available to the agency through the FTC's use of the social networking platform, Instagram ([www.instagram.com](http://www.instagram.com)). The purpose of this PIA is: (i) to ensure that the FTC's handling of available PII conforms to applicable legal, regulatory, and policy requirements regarding privacy, (ii) to determine the risks and effects if the FTC were to collect, maintain or disseminate such information, and (iii) to examine and evaluate protections and alternative processes for handling such information to mitigate potential privacy risks. *See* section 208 of the E-Government Act of 2002 (E-GOV); Office of Management & Budget (OMB) Memoranda 03-22 (2003) & 10-23 (2010); OMB Circular A-130 (2017).

## SECTION 1.0 PURPOSE

### 1.1 – What is the specific purpose of the FTC's use of Instagram, and how does that use fit with the agency's broader mission?

The FTC uses Instagram, a social media platform owned by Meta, in order to disseminate information to the public. The FTC's Instagram profile is administered by the Office of Public Affairs (OPA).

The FTC's Instagram page allows the Commission to promote FTC news and resources to consumers who may not be regular visitors to FTC websites, including [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) and [www.consumer.ftc.gov](http://www.consumer.ftc.gov). Information posted to the FTC's Instagram page will be previously approved by FTC staff and includes, but is not limited to agency announcements, consumer education, consumer alerts, videos, and blog posts. These pages are available to the public if they have an Instagram account. The vast majority of the FTC's content on Instagram is also available on existing FTC websites. Users who wish to actively engage with the FTC on Instagram must be registered users of the site, per Instagram's [Terms of Use](#). Registered users who interact with the FTC on Instagram may like, comment on, and share the FTC's news and information. Such interactions add a viral marketing component to the Commission's public outreach and education efforts.

This PIA addresses the FTC's use of Instagram to disseminate information to and interact with consumers about the Commission's mission-related initiatives. It does not encompass the use of Instagram for law enforcement investigations or any collection of personal information subject to the Privacy Act of 1974, and described more fully in the FTC's [Statement of Record Notice I-1 \(Nonpublic Investigational and Other Nonpublic Legal Program Records\)](#).<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Per OMB Circular A-130, personally identifiable information (PII) means information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity, either alone or when combined with other information that is linked or linkable to a specific individual.

<sup>2</sup> See OMB 10-23 at 2 (requiring PIAs for "any Federal agency use of third-party websites or applications to engage with the public for the purpose of implementing the principles of the Open Government Directive"). OMB 10-23 specifically carves out applicability for "activities that are part of authorized law enforcement, national security, or intelligence activities."

## **1.2 – Is the FTC’s use of Instagram consistent with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies?**

Yes. With respect to the information that the FTC will disseminate through its Instagram page, the FTC Act authorizes the FTC to prevent unfair and deceptive acts and practices in interstate commerce and, in furtherance of this mission, to gather, compile, and make information available in the public interest. See 15 U.S.C. 45, 46(a), (f). The President’s January 21, 2009 memorandum on *Transparency and Open Government* and the OMB Director’s December 8, 2009 *Open Government Directive* call on federal departments and agencies to harness new technologies to engage with the public. Using tools to communicate with consumers on platforms where they are active helps the FTC to meet the federal guidance outlined in the directive and memorandum including transparency, participation and collaboration. The FTC’s use of Instagram also complies with other applicable Federal privacy and information security laws, including the Privacy Act of 1974, section 208 of the E-Government Act (E-GOV), the Federal Information Security Modernization Act (FISMA), and implementing policy guidance.

When the FTC’s account administrators share content on Instagram, including responses to comments, they will strive to direct users to relevant FTC website pages as much as possible. The FTC’s official website (<https://www.ftc.gov>) remains the official and primary source of information available to the public about the Commission, not its Instagram profile, as explained in notices that will be posted in the bio of the FTC’s Instagram page.

## **SECTION 2.0 – AVAILABILITY OF PII**

### **2.1 – What PII is made available to the FTC?**

Individual users who register with Instagram are required to provide a first name, last name, valid email address or mobile telephone number, password, sex, and date of birth to create a personal Instagram profile. Instagram also requires individuals to create a user name and provides them with the option to link their Facebook account, if the user so chooses.<sup>3</sup> Once registered, users have the option to provide a wealth of additional information about themselves such as telephone number, and photos/videos which may be displayed on the individual user’s personal Instagram profile page or otherwise maintained or used by Instagram. Although the FTC does not collect or maintain personal information belonging to users of Instagram, this information may be available to the agency in whole or part, based on a user’s privacy settings. The FTC may read, review, or rely upon information that Instagram users make available to the public or to the FTC as authorized or required by law. The privacy impact of the FTC’s use of this platform is low, as the FTC does not routinely use Instagram to solicit, collect, maintain, or disseminate PII from members of the public. In specific circumstances, the FTC may collect limited information (e.g. usernames or handles) about members of the public (e.g., if messages or posts directed to the FTC or its employees on Instagram are deemed as threatening or violent, or where the content may reveal some other potential law enforcement violation). The FTC may

---

<sup>3</sup> For more information about how the FTC uses Facebook, refer to the agency’s [Facebook Privacy Impact Assessment](#).

also occasionally produce reports or summaries of its use of this social media platform that include PII that is already posted publicly (i.e., usernames): for instance, it may do so if needed to comply with social media records retention guidelines from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). In such instances, the collection of PII in these summaries will be reduced as much as is feasible. FTC Instagram administrators may delete any comments on the Commission’s Instagram profile that contain unnecessary amounts of PII, as stated in the FTC’s comment policy that will be posted on its Instagram page. The FTC may use generic user data available to page administrators through Instagram Insights, the platform’s analytics tool. This includes, but is not limited to, information about the number of likes on the page and percentage of engagement in a given time period. None of the information that the FTC gleans from Insights includes any PII.

## **2.2 – What are the sources of the PII?**

Individual Instagram users are the source of any PII made available to the agency on Instagram. Users who are logged in and interact with the FTC’s pages by liking, sharing, or commenting on FTC posts, at a minimum, make their names available to the FTC. Registered users of Instagram provide additional information as outlined in Section 2.1, which the FTC may or may not be able to see, depending on a user’s privacy settings, which the user controls.

## **2.3 – Do the FTC’s activities trigger the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) and, if so, how will the agency comply with the statute?**

Per the OMB memorandum, *Social Media, Web-Based Interactive Technologies, and the Paperwork Reduction Act* (April 7, 2010), the FTC’s use of Instagram as outlined in Section 1.1 is not a web-based interactive technology that would trigger the PRA, since the FTC’s use of Instagram is not an information collection activity under that law.

## **SECTION 3.0 -- THE FTC’S INTENDED OR EXPECTED USE OF PII**

### **3.1 – Generally, how will the agency use the PII described in Section 2.0?**

The FTC will use Instagram to disseminate information to the public. See also Section 2.1 above. The FTC may also use some analytical data from Instagram, as described in Section 3.2, but this information does not contain PII.

### **3.2 – Provide specific examples of the types of uses to which the PII may be subject.**

For example, when the FTC posts pictures or “Stories” (photos or videos that vanish after 24 hours) on its Instagram profile, individuals may sometimes comment or like the posts. These comments may include PII from the individual making the comment, such as their names. The FTC may read, review, or rely upon information provided by individuals in comments on Instagram, based on the privacy preferences of the individual who is commenting. See also section 3.1 and 2.1 above. The Commission may also use Instagram’s analytics tool to measure the overall number of likes, and other engagement activities with the FTC’s Instagram profile. Any data collected or maintained by the FTC from Instagram Insights will not contain PII.

## **SECTION 4.0 -- SHARING OR DISCLOSING OF PII**

### **4.1 – With what entities or persons inside or outside the agency will the PII be shared, and for what purposes will the PII be disclosed?**

All information provided by users who interact with the FTC on Instagram by liking, commenting on, or sharing FTC news and information is also publicly available on Instagram to anyone visiting the FTC's pages. As noted earlier, the FTC can exercise limited control over the sharing of PII on its Instagram profile by deleting individual comments, consistent with its commenting policy, if an individual posts unnecessary amounts of PII. See also 2.1 above, since in limited instances, PII posted on Instagram may need to be specifically provided to others at the agency, to other law enforcement agencies, or to NARA. As noted in 1.2, the FTC's Instagram page is not the official FTC website. Instagram is controlled and operated by a third party and is not a government website or application. Therefore, by using Instagram and its application providers to access the FTC's Instagram profile, users may be providing non-government third parties access to their personal information, which can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity. Additionally, Instagram and its application providers may use persistent technology throughout their sites. There is a possibility that other third party applications may access and share user information. For example, links posted by the FTC may lead to third-party, non-government websites that may have different privacy policies than those of Instagram or the FTC. When visiting the FTC Instagram profile, users should be aware of their privacy settings and the personal information being collected by Instagram and non-FTC related applications.

### **4.2 – What safeguards are in place to prevent expansion of use beyond those authorized under law and described in this PIA?**

Only authorized staff members from OPA have access to manage the FTC's Instagram page. Each staff member with access must sign and comply with the Commission's internal Rules of Behavior for account management, prior to beginning account administration. The FTC's Instagram account is registered as an official business account, and administrators do not use their personal FTC accounts to manage them.

## **SECTION 5.0 -- MAINTENANCE AND RETENTION OF PII**

### **5.1 – How will the FTC maintain the PII, and for how long?**

In general, the FTC does not routinely use Instagram to solicit, collect, maintain, or disseminate PII from members of the public; as such, the agency will not maintain PII from Instagram. In the limited instances in which the FTC does so (see 2.1 above), any PII collected is securely stored in accordance with FTC policy. See, for instance, the [GSS Privacy Impact Assessment](#). As part of the Commission's staff reports, any information collected from Instagram Insights is kept in accordance with Federal record retention requirements; this information normally does not contain any PII nor is it kept in any type of a searchable

database. Individual users register for Instagram account and maintain their data on Instagram to the extent permitted by Instagram’s [terms of use](#). For example, users who choose to interact with the FTC can publicly “unlike” and delete their interactions on the FTC’s pages at any time. FTC Instagram profile administrators have limited ability to delete users and/or their comments, and block users, as noted earlier. Staff deletes comments that violate the FTC’s comment policy, which will be outlined on its Instagram page. The FTC will not maintain any record of deleted comments, nor do FTC officials notify users that their comments have violated the comment policy.

## **5.2 – Was the retention period established to minimize privacy risk?**

In general, this does not apply, as the FTC does not routinely use Instagram to solicit, collect, maintain, or disseminate PII from members of the public. In the limited instances in which the FTC does so (see 2.1 above), any PII collected will be retained and disposed of in accordance with [NARA’s General Records Schedule \(GRS\) 6.4, item 020](#), Public Comments and Communications Not Requiring Formal Action, or other records schedules that may apply. Per the FTC’s own [privacy policy](#), the FTC will not collect any unnecessary information (including PII), in order to minimize privacy risk and reduce the amount of information that must be maintained.

## **SECTION 6.0 – HOW THE AGENCY WILL SECURE PII**

### **6.1 – Will the FTC’s privacy and security officials coordinate to develop methods of securing PII?**

In general, this does not apply, as the FTC will not routinely use Instagram to solicit, collect, maintain, or disseminate PII from members of the public. Regarding the limited instances in which the FTC does so (see 2.1 above), privacy and security officials routinely coordinate to develop methods to secure all agency PII. Any FTC copies of comments or other user interactions on Instagram with the FTC are maintained by the FTC subject to applicable Federal privacy and information security laws. Instagram, not the FTC, controls the security of comments or other information posted on that site. Instagram users should review Instagram’s terms of service and privacy policies for information regarding the security of that site.

## **SECTION 7.0 – IDENTIFICATION AND MITIGATION OF OTHER PRIVACY RISKS**

### **7.1 – What other privacy risks exist, and how will the agency mitigate those risks?**

The privacy impact of the FTC’s use of this platform is low, as the FTC will not routinely use Instagram to solicit, collect, maintain, or disseminate PII from members of the public. See 2.1 for more information. However, Instagram is a third-party service that uses persistent tracking technologies. In an effort to help consumers understand how their information is used by Instagram, the FTC will post additional notices to users in the bio of its Instagram page, including a Instagram-specific [privacy policy](#). Furthermore, the FTC will inform consumers who link to FTC Instagram posts from official FTC websites that they are leaving the FTC’s websites and the Commission’s privacy policy no longer governs, and will provide links to

Instagram’s privacy policy. These notices will be available through exit scripts or text overlays at all points that connect users to Instagram from official FTC websites.

The FTC’s Instagram page will not contain any third-party advertising. This limits any association with, or obscures links to, additional content that the FTC has neither reviewed nor endorsed on the FTC’s Instagram page. In addition, Instagram users should review the site’s terms of service and privacy policies to understand how Instagram may collect information about such users, including what pages the user may visit, and how Instagram may use or share such information for third-party advertising or other purposes.

Users should also exercise care and be aware of the risks associated with any third-party Web site, particularly as to any tracking technology (e.g., cookies, beacons) and potentially interactive content (e.g., links, videos, games, applications, messaging, or other features or functions) that may collect, use, or share the user’s personal information, or compromise the user’s computer security, without the user’s knowledge or consent (e.g., malware, spyware, phishing). Because the vast majority of the FTC’s content on Instagram is already available on the FTC’s official websites, consumers do not need to visit or utilize the FTC’s Instagram page if they have any privacy concerns about any third-party material (e.g., a comment or link) posted on such pages. Likewise, the FTC’s Instagram account administrators shall attempt to identify and remove such privacy and security threats and vulnerabilities as they may arise, if any, in managing the FTC’s pages.

## **SECTION 8.0 – CREATION OR MODIFICATION OF A SYSTEM OF RECORDS**

### **8.1 – Will the FTC’s activities create or modify a “system of records” under the Privacy Act of 1974?**

No. The FTC will not collect PII from Instagram in a manner that would require the FTC to create or modify a system of records under the Privacy Act of 1974.