

When a social media user dies, platforms face the challenge of balancing the deceased's privacy, their loved ones' wishes, and the user's digital legacy. Instagram and Snapchat offer contrasting approaches to this sensitive issue.

Regarding Instagram, a representative of the deceased can contact Instagram's help center and request the user's account be deleted or memorialized, transforming the account into a static digital tribute. This process requires submitting birth and death certificates, along with legal documents proving authority over the deceased's affairs. Once memorialized, the account displays "Remembering" next to the user's name; thereafter, no one can log in, and no new content or changes can be made to existing media, comments, or privacy settings. Instagram aims to exclude memorialized content from discovery features like the explore page to prevent distress for loved ones but the content shared by the deceased remains visible to their original audience. All content, even in memorialized accounts, remains subject to Instagram's community guidelines, allowing for reporting of violations.

Snapchat adopts a stricter stance on accessing deceased users' accounts, prioritizing privacy above all. According to Snapchat Support, account access is only possible with the deceased's verified email, phone number, and login details. There's currently no built-in feature to indicate a user's passing on their profile unless someone with login access manually changes the username or profile picture. If an account remains inactive, its data stays on Snapchat's servers until the platform deletes inactive accounts.

For account deletion, a representative can submit a written request through Snapchat's support portal under the "I can't access my account" section. However, even for deletion, the representative needs the deceased user's email or phone number for verification purposes. This stringent process ensures that only those with specific login information or verified contact details can access the account, making it challenging for loved ones to manage a deceased person's digital presence without prior access.

The distinct policies of Instagram and Snapchat highlight the complexities of managing digital legacies. Instagram provides a more public, memorialized option, enabling families to preserve a loved one's online legacy while still considering privacy. In stark contrast, Snapchat maintains a rigorous privacy model, making account access and deletion highly restrictive and dependent on the deceased's original login credentials. These divergent approaches underscore the delicate balance social media platforms must strike between individual privacy, the needs of grieving loved ones, and the digital footprint of those who have passed.

Works Cited

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