

What are the advantages and dangers of social networking sites (such as Facebook)?

Nowadays it is difficult to find someone who does not have a profile on at least one social network. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are among the most popular and add up to billions of users. Although there is a minimum age to start using the social network, there are people of all ages sharing moments, information and experiences through the social networking sites. With so many people using it, one can imagine that social networks should not be all bad and that they should have something very good to "trap" people there and each day to win new fans. And indeed, there is. However, not everything is all roses and sunshine.

In this article we separate the advantages and disadvantages of virtual space, so you can evaluate how you are using the service and if you are aware that it is important to go with caution when it comes to "playing" on social networks.

Whether it's your mobile phone, computer or tablet, as long as your device is connected to the internet, you can instantly connect with people around the world. Be it your neighbour, work colleague, former college classmate, or someone on the other side of the ocean. There is no distance to social networks. In addition, networks such as Twitter let you know what is happening in the world right now. According to Lars Willnat and David H. Weaver, "The American Journalist in the Digital Age: Key Findings," (news.indiana.edu, 2014) 78.5% of traditional media reporters polled used social media to check for breaking news, 59% of Twitter users and 31% of Facebook users polled followed breaking news on these sites. (Michael Barthel, Elisa Shearer, Jeffrey Gottfried, and Amy Mitchell, "The Evolving Role of News on Twitter and Facebook," journalism.org, July 14, 2015).

On the other side all kind of information is thrown to this environment of social networking that sometimes can mislead some people and also bait for information about something that is not true. A study published in the journal Science found that lies spread six times faster than the truth on Twitter, and "fake news" is retweeted more often than true news. (Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, Sinan Aral, "The Spread of True and False News Online," Science, Mar. 2018) Unreliable and false information can be spread so quickly where everybody has access in a blink of an eye.

If previously the photos were taken to be stored in the albums, today they can be seen by hundreds and even thousands of people in real digital albums. But, you have to be careful about the amount of personal information that is posted on social networks, as they can endanger your safety and your family. It's very difficult to maintain privacy on social networks. As much as the profile is restricted to just friends, however, the actions taken and shared by the networks can be accompanied by many people. This can even damage the personal and professional life of users.

These are some advantages and disadvantages of social networking. A little common sense does not hurt anyone, does it? One must be aware of the risks to which we expose ourselves when we become part of one or more social networks. And, as far as possible, try to protect yourself, always.

