

Social Media In The Spotlight

Nowadays, social media is constantly present in our daily routine. Everybody loves sharing their own lives and watching what the rest of the world is doing but, why?

It is not a secret that technology has evolved during the past years. We are getting so used to rapid changes that we do not realise the current technological achievements. Five years ago, the existence of the phones we have today was unthinkable. This also happened with social media.

At first, it entered our lives as a way of enjoying online content. One of the first platforms that became famous was *Facebook*, created in 2004. In only 17 years, *Facebook* has improved its algorithms until levels that we could have not imagined. Right now, this company owns other platforms like *Instagram* and *WhatsApp*.

One of the most remarkable APPs in today's society is *TikTok*. It was created in 2016. It seems incredible how a platform that began its "life" 5 years ago has become the leading one among all other social media APPs, especially, within teenagers.

As with everything in this world, social media has its advantages and its disadvantages. In this essay, I am going to analyse some of the pros and cons of this issue.

When I started using social media applications, I was 14 years old. People under 13 years old are usually not allowed to create an account on most of the different social networks. Nevertheless, it is very easy to lie on the Internet, as you only need to select a fake birth date. It was the first time I created an account. My mother told me that I would not be allowed to use these platforms until I was the required age. She read the needed conditions with me, twice. In this way, I would be concerned about all the requisites that I had to carry out in order to be a member of that community. She was very concerned about all the dangers and threats of the Internet.

However, my peers created their accounts without asking for permission from their parents. They did not tell them that they uploaded contents to social media. Most of them posted where they lived, where they went on vacation and where they spent their free time. All of this without the permission of their own parents. They were not only publishing private data of themselves, but also about their families without them even knowing about it, which I thought was not right. My mother told me that whenever I wanted to post a picture of someone, I needed to ask that person for his or her consent. To summarise, we have irresponsible children uploading content (sometimes without being the required age), and unaware parents that do not know their children are active users of social media, posting about their private lives.

Going on with children, there are numerous cases in which they have been tricked by older people in order to obtain personal data or even pictures. They usually achieve this by lying and saying they are people of their surroundings: school mates, neighbours, friends of their friends... Parents normally do not notice this until the worst happens.

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This reflects there is a lack of education in terms of the safe usage of social media: it is very innovative, so there are not many rules or laws that define what is allowed and what it is not. Evidently, this shows we need to raise awareness: parents need to control the contents that their children upload to the net, because even though they may have the best intentions they are still immature, because they are kids.

Otherwise, one of the aspects I like about social media is the fact that you can get informed about recent news very rapidly. Imagine you have seen an accident on the street, and you want to know what has happened. You just have to type some key words on Twitter related to the incident and you will see how many other users are informing in real time about what they have seen. Amazing, isn't it? Some years ago, the only media channels we had in order to obtain information were the radio and the television. Nowadays, we also have social media, where you can find out the most recent Hollywood breakups, the newest songs of your favourite singers or when will the newest videogames be launched.

Alternatively, fake news are also on the net. Sometimes, people share them without knowing if they are true or not. This leads to continuous misunderstanding among the users. When you read a piece of news on social media, you need to keep in mind that it may not be true. Users are not verified communication channels. This is important in order not to believe everything we read on these platforms.

From the very first moment you start to use social networks, you are feeding into their algorithms. What does this mean? Each account is shown different recommendations and advertisements depending on the pictures they like, the content they consume, the people they follow... All these factors create your own and personalized account. What is wrong if I like photography and I see camera's advertisements or several profiles of professional photographers? Nothing, but they are taking your data. They analyze the seconds you spend watching each publication, the number, nationalities and age from the people that you follow or that follows you, etc. With all of these things, they get to know you: your favourite music, artists, your best friends...

We tend to think that social media is free. In fact, it is, but at the cost of your personal data. They sell your information to businesses so that they know where it is best to advertise themselves. For instance, taking the previous example, if I love photography and I see the advertisement of the newest camera in the market, I will probably stare at it and buy it. On the contrary, if I see an advertisement for a skateboard, I may stare at it, but I will probably not buy it. This is the reason why it is crucial to understand that social media is not free: you are the price.

Although these platforms have some disadvantages, I think one principal advantage is that you can keep in touch with people that you do not get to see in your daily life. Some years ago, I participated in an exchange programme to Germany. Currently, I am still in contact with my German friend thanks to social media. We write to each other, we have video calls, we send voice messages, we share playlists... If we did not have *WhatsApp* or *Instagram*, I am sure we would have lost contact already. It has been three years since we last saw each other in person, but we talk almost every week, and I am so happy that we have the chance to just take our phones and text a message in less than five seconds. My parents did not have the opportunity to keep in touch with their exchange partners, so I feel very lucky.



However, there is a crucial thing that users do not always take into account: once you upload something to the net, it stays in the net. You can delete it from your profile, but it does not mean that you eliminate it from the Internet. This has various consequences. Sometimes, people post pictures and videos about embarrassing situations. This may not have short-term sequels, but it might be harmful for yourself with time. For example, you can post a video of you and your friends drinking at a party. Why not? It can happen that you go to a job interview some years later and they think you are the best person for the position. Later on, they may check your social media profiles and find out the video of you and your friends drinking at the party. This can make them change their minds, because they might not want a person that gives that image in their company. Therefore, we must be aware about what we upload in our accounts.

As far as I am concerned, I believe social media is great for some things (news, following your friends, keep in touch with people...) but it is not so good for others: you can get tricked, hacked, the platforms steal your data... I think we can enjoy social media using reasoning and intelligence. We need to establish ourselves some limits and be aware of the dangers of the Internet. I also believe that we need to reinforce the knowledge about social networks, especially to children. Not only for their own enjoyment, but also for their safety because the children of today are the society of tomorrow.

