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In recent years social media has become deeply integrated in our everyday lives. The concept of social media itself includes several categories: blogs, live journals, forums, chats, dating sites and, of course, social networking sites or SNS. Essentially, they all are platforms for people's remote communication, i.e. exchange of different types of information: text messages, music, photo and video content. The most popular with the young people are social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vkontakte and so on. On the one hand, a social network is a very convenient tool for a quick message exchange, searching for old friends and making new acquaintances, keeping important information and discussing pressing issues in groups, right in the comfort of one's home. On the other hand, psychologists and psychiatrists of the world ring alarm bells: social networking addiction too often becomes the cause of serious mental and nervous disorders, such as depression, social isolation, autism, and even suicide attempts of teenagers and young people. To my mind, social networking sites can be both useful and dangerous depending on who and how uses them. And I want to try to analyze their advantages and disadvantages.

First and foremost, social networking sites are very convenient for those who need to keep in touch with people living in different cities or different countries. Using such a site you can quickly create a group chat, send necessary files to several people, share photos and videos, or even launch a videoconference. And all this is absolutely free!

Social networks can become a great solution for people with disabilities or those who for some reason have to stay at home all the time. In some situations they can completely substitute a real-life communication and help such people not to feel lonely or socially isolated. Numerous special interest groups let them find friends and interesting dialogue partners.

Sometimes social networking sites help to find really precious and useful information. In different groups people from all over the world discuss various issues, share their personal experiences, provide useful links, write comments and reviews for goods and services. You in turn can ask any question and get answers from different people. Also social networks give a great opportunity to distribute any information within the shortest possible time. Many people today learn news from SNS. If something really important happened, the best way to inform people of this is to post the information in some popular Facebook groups.

Finally, thanks to social networking sites, you will never lose information about your friends and other important people. You don't need to keep in mind their dates of birth and phone numbers any more. At any moment you can check up this information via your smartphone. You will never lose your favourite films or music as well, because you can save them on your personal page with a single click of a mouse.

This was one side of the coin. Unfortunately, there is another one, which is not so bright. For a great number of children and teenagers social networks today have almost completely substituted real life. Some of them spend so much time online that the distinction between life and virtual reality for them becomes blurred. As a result, children suffer from the lack of live communication, though they even don't realize it. It inevitably causes mental disorders, influences their health and spirits, and prevents their normal socialization.

Another major problem associated with social networking sites is leakage of information. Posting any personal information, you can never know for sure where it will reemerge. Anyone can use your personal photos, and in most cases you cannot prevent it. Even if you think that your personal page is protected with a safe password, you are mistaken, because good hackers can break it at one stroke.

Moreover, apart from useful content, any social network contains tons of useless, hazardous and dangerous information, which is easily accessible to children. Violence, erotic, propaganda of drugs and other forbidden content is regularly deleted by moderators, but it appears again too quickly for them to cope with it.

So, summing it up, I'd like to say that social networking sites could be rather useful if all the people used them for their intended purpose - for communicating, searching for friends and sharing information with them. Also, to my mind, caring parents should limit their children's access to social media, and regularly check up their actions on the Internet. Otherwise, social networks can make a real harm to children's and teenagers' minds.

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