
IS FACEBOOK GOOD OR BAD?

Facebook is a very powerful platform for connecting with other users over social media and it is being used by over 2 billion users worldwide every month. 1.15 billion of them are active daily and the numbers are only rising at a double digit rate. While this presents huge opportunities for users to connect, market, promote, and do a lot more things, its abuse can also put them into dangers.

It is actually not the question of Facebook being good or bad but a question of use or abuse of the platform. Facebook is only a platform that is driven by people. Facebook looks powerful but the actual power lies in the hands of the user. What determines the good and bad occurrence is in the way it is used.

Among the popular groups on Facebook, there are groups promoting big causes such as finding missing kids, saving of environment, fight for injustice, and women welfare, and there are other groups that are promoting themes like war, hacking, and terrorism.

Beyond these groups, Facebook has been used by hackers and users causing troubles to many in many ways. While hacking is a universal problem that everyone is aware of, it is interesting to know how abusers use Facebook to cause troubles. Some stories are worth noticing:

- Peter Chapman, a 35 year old serial rapist posted himself as a handsome teenager on Facebook and connected with Ashleigh Hall, a 17 year old nurse. The two also met but he pulled off the conversation saying that he was Peter's father. The unfortunate friendship between the two led to the murder of poor girl in September 2009. Peter was given a jail sentence of 35 years post that.
- Ms Phoebe Prince who became a victim of Cyberbullying in 2010 was subjected to many taunts and abuses over social media before she committed suicide hanging her to death.
- The unfortunate death of Camille Mathurasingh, who was murdered by her boyfriend in 2009, was the outcome of her boyfriend seeing her with another man on her Facebook page.
- A 23 year old Nigerian woman became crazy after her divorce and tagged her ex-husband, Alfa Umar Gobir on Facebook as a member of Boko Haram which is a Jihadist terrorist group. This obviously caused troubles for Alfa.
- Jonathan G. Parker, a burglar used Facebook accounts to login to computers of victims and stole the information that kept him informed about the whereabouts of victims making it easy for him to commit the crime of burglary. Once, he forgot to log out of a victim's account and as a result, investigations led the police to him and he got arrested.

What do these stories tell you about dangers of Facebook?

- It is not the platform but the cruel intentions of people that cause abuse
- People often fall prey to dangers because of their own acts and not directly due to Facebook
- Personal information that is shared on the Facebook is the key ingredient that plays a critical role in planning of the abuser or attacker so one needs to be very careful about what is being posted on Facebook

- Victims are mostly the people who are emotionally vulnerable and easily trust others such as young kids and single women

In UK alone, there have been 100,000 cases of crimes in past five years that can be linked to Facebook. A whopping 540% rise of Facebook crimes in past 3 years have raised alarms and Police have taken efforts to track abusers which is why, we can also see many arrests following the Facebook crimes. However, in most cases, police comes to help only after a crime has already been committed. So, it is best that you protect yourself first.

How can you do that? Here are some ideas:

- When connecting with new people, look for their descriptions and personal details. Is there anything spooky here?
- Any offensive or maligning post must be immediately reported to Facebook. Do not ignore the small harms as they can grow big in future
- Do not participate in every pop up game or app as it can capture your personal details without your awareness
- Do not use location based service like Foursquare with Facebook as they can exposure you more.
- Understand all the privacy and security settings your account has and use them wherever needed without fail. Some of these include
 - Disallowing your friend to tag you in pictures without your permission
 - Disallowing your friends to share your information by restricting them through applications and website settings
 - Keeping your pictures private so that they can only be seen by friends and not strangers