



Children talking to their grandparents via Facebook's Messenger video chat during the Covid-19 outbreak in El Masnou, north of Barcelona, Spain. REUTERS/Albert Gea

## Gen Alpha will tire of living online

As kids born in the 2010s age into the digital world, their fatigue from being forced online will prompt a backlash similar to Gen Z. Both will become smarter about the implicit agreement of trading services for data — and make life more difficult for companies from Alphabet to OpenAI.

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### SCREENED OUT

For all the changes that technology has brought about, one thing will stay the same in 2024. Generation Alpha, kids born in the 2010s, are going to want to be “different” from their parents. For them, that means spending less time online. For companies counting on their data, that means life is about to get harder.

Members of the youngest generation may have a role model in their slightly older peers when it comes to pushing back against an all-enveloping digital world. Globally, the amount of time people spent on social media declined year-over-year in 2023 for the first time since the consumer research firm GWI started tracking it in 2012, according to its latest survey of over 950,000 internet users. Gen Zers, born between 1997 and 2007, are at the forefront of the shift. One-third of those surveyed said they were actively trying to limit their usage of such platforms, seeking out hobbies and friendships in the physical world instead.

In addition to cutting down screen time, the internet's next generation will look to get more out of what they put in. Those who have slowly been lulled into increased online usage have been willing to accept the implicit agreement that underpinned the rise of social media, wherein companies offered services like email and messaging to users at no cost in exchange for the ability to collect data about them and sell it to advertisers. Younger generations are going to become more aggressive about demanding a change.

The rise of generative AI tools trained to mimic human behaviour will only accelerate the backlash. Tech firms such as Alphabet and OpenAI are facing lawsuits from authors and artists who say the companies improperly scraped their intellectual property from the web to train AI models. Start-ups like Caden and Databy claim to help reshape this relationship by allowing users to peddle their valuable data directly to firms. Tech giants are on notice. Instagram parent Meta Platforms and social media site X both rolled out new tools in 2023 to facilitate payments to content creators who post on their platforms.

If companies don't pay up, Gen Alpha kids will make use of tools to withhold their personal information. TikTok influencer Coco Moe, who herself has over a million followers, reckons that virtual avatars will become popular among young users seeking to mask their identities on social media sites. Some parents, too, are growing wary. Meta boss Mark Zuckerberg, for example, hides his kids' faces when posting photos of them publicly. As their generation grows up, they're likely to do as Zuckerberg does, not as his company hopes. ● Reuters