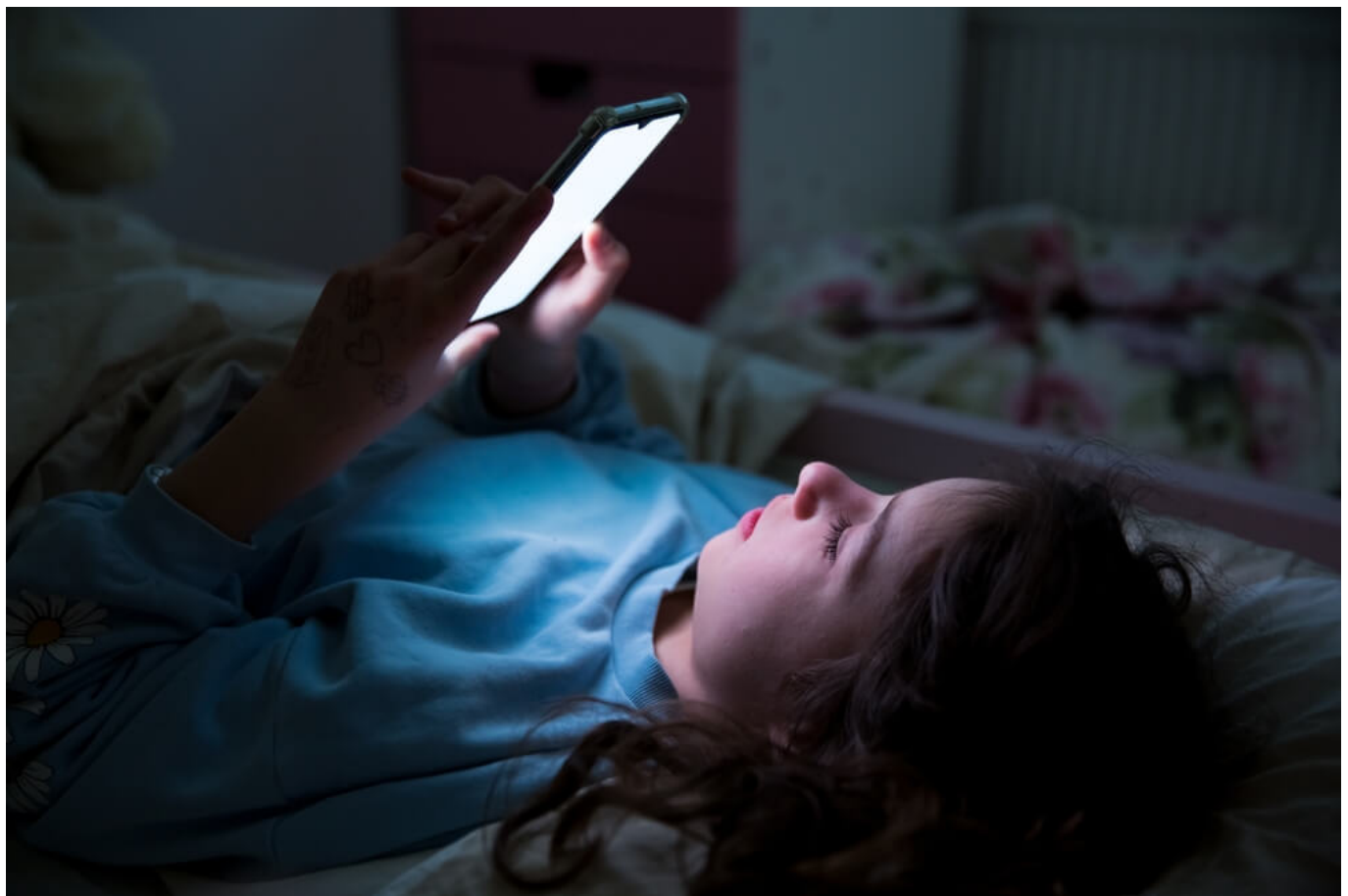




By: Elise Quevedo

Preserving childhood in the AI age



This is a topic I wish we did not need to talk about. I write about robotics, cybersecurity, semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and the technologies influencing our future every week.

Innovation can enhance people's lives, solve difficult problems, and open doors that were unthinkable for earlier generations. However, I am occasionally reminded that technical advancement calls for greater accountability.

This week, as I celebrated one more year on planet Earth, I sat outdoors reflecting, as I do each year, when I saw a young girl standing in front of a camera. At the same time, her dad guided her to record another video for social media. She hesitated and looked uncomfortable. The recording continued anyway. Although this occurrence seems to have become a normal sight on the streets, I wondered: how far is too far?

This reflection focuses on the digital environment we have built for kids. In this new world where followers can seem more precious than friendships, and likes can feel like affirmation, online exposure can occasionally become a goal before childhood has ever had a chance to develop organically.

The childhood many of us remember is very different from the childhood children have today. Content is curated using artificial intelligence. Algorithms influence attention. Smartphones blur the lines between social life, school, and home. Social media is part of the milieu in which many young people grow up.

As we all know, technology has evolved at an extraordinary pace, but our understanding of how to protect childhood has not kept up.

The latest figures from the [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) report the highest annual number of child suicides recorded since at least 2001.

Statistics alone never tell the full story, and no single factor explains such a complex public health challenge.

Mental health, family circumstances, education, healthcare access, bullying, and many other influences all play important roles.

But these numbers remind us that children's wellbeing deserves far greater attention at a time when digital experiences increasingly shape their daily lives.

Building a safer digital childhood requires shared responsibility

One of the people whose work I respect on this subject is Professor Mary Aiken. I've had the pleasure of meeting her a few times and having very inspiring conversations.

As one of the world's leading experts in [cyberpsychology](#), she has spent years examining how technology influences human behaviour, particularly among children and young people. Her work reinforces that digital environments are not neutral.

They shape behaviour, relationships, identity, and emotional development in ways we are still working to understand.

Conversations about online safety often become polarised. Some people blame technology companies, others blame parents, and others point to schools or governments. The bottom line is that we all share responsibility.

Tech companies should have a duty to create tools that prioritise child safety over engagement metrics. [Legislators](#) must keep developing laws that account for today's digital realities rather than the technologies of the past.

Children should be taught digital literacy alongside language, science and arithmetic in schools. However, parents may have the hardest task of all. They have to deal with technology that did not exist when they were growing up. I do not envy that responsibility.

Innovation cannot come at the expense of childhood

At the same time, not every child should become a content creator simply because the technology makes it possible.

Social media has created extraordinary opportunities. It has given young entrepreneurs a voice, enabled creativity on a global scale, and connected communities across continents.

I have spent much of my own career embracing digital innovation because I have witnessed its positive impact first-hand.

However, children should never be judged by followers, views, or comments. Before they can make their own decisions, children are unable to fully comprehend the ramifications of public exposure or the permanence of a digital trace. Adults can.

The behaviour observed this week reminded me that it was time to highlight this topic again, because I saw a young girl who just wanted to have fun end up in a stressful situation.

Artificial intelligence introduces another layer of complexity. AI determines which content children discover, how long they remain engaged, and what captures their attention next. Recommendation systems continue to become more sophisticated, while children remain developmentally less equipped than adults to recognise persuasive design or algorithmic influence.

Innovation cannot come at the expense of childhood. Period.

Redefining digital success for the next generation

History shows that society eventually adapts to every major technological revolution. We introduced seat belts as cars became more

common, developed aviation safety standards as air travel expanded, and established regulations that made workplaces safer during industrialisation.

Technology evolves, and society learns. Artificial intelligence and social media need the same thoughtful approach.



The next chapter of digital innovation should focus less on capturing attention and more on protecting wellbeing

The next chapter of digital innovation should focus less on capturing attention and more on protecting wellbeing. Success should not be measured solely by engagement or growth. It should also be measured by trust, transparency, and positive human outcomes.

This involves creating age-appropriate digital experiences, which are becoming more and more common. It involves teaching both coding and critical thinking. It means allowing kids to challenge what they see online. It also means recognising that time spent offline should be valued equally with time spent online.

The conversation should never become one of choosing between technology and childhood. Children deserve both.

They deserve access to innovation, education, creativity, and opportunity. But they also deserve privacy, emotional safety, healthy relationships, and the freedom to make mistakes without every moment becoming permanent digital content.

Artificial intelligence should transform society for the better. Every generation leaves something behind for the next. Ours will leave a digital world unlike anything humanity has

experienced before. Artificial intelligence will continue to evolve, and social media will continue to change.

One of the most obvious signs of whether innovation benefits humanity should be the protection of children.

I hope that when future generations look back, they remember that we acknowledged the difficulty, took responsibility for it, and made the decision to create a digital world where childhood remained something to preserve and not something to profit from.

Will today's children thank us for the choices we made?