If I asked you to express who you are, you might quote great writers and poets. I would use a bunch of internet slang instead. I'm a part of 'Generation Alpha,' the first ever generation to be online literally from birth. But lately, I find myself facing a hard truth. I'm addicted. I find another day has gone by, and I've spent it trapped in a never-ending cycle of mindlessly scrolling away on my phone, not being able to stop. That's a big problem. I have a 4-year-old cousin, and he's even worse. He's what they call an "iPad kid". If he whines, he's given his tablet. He cries? Give him his tablet. If he raises his voice? You guessed it. Tablet again. That has me terrified. What is going to happen to these kids, to me, when we grow up? Where is our generation heading?

We know very well that excessive use of technology and social media can cause anxiety, depression, feelings of isolation, and that's just in adults. Children are even more vulnerable. We're not strong enough to just get off our devices on our own. Believe me, I've tried many times. These skills have to be learned and practiced. Even though we know all this, we're still not paying enough attention to this problem. We're giving kids free reign over technology whenever they please, even when it's bad for them. This only sets them up for failure and addiction: Creators fight for our attention, and we end up spending vast amounts of time watching content people call "brain rot": colorful and attractive but with no substance. Because of this, attention spans are lower than ever. I see it in myself and the people around me.

Another big issue is how not everything online is appropriate for kids, and I've experienced this first-hand.

One day, when I was 7-years-old, I clicked on a cute thumbnail, but the video was far from cute. It contained graphic images of self-harm. I still can't get them out of my mind. It was a traumatizing experience I'll never forget. That's not all, when you escape from reality through your phone, it can become toxic. It's just too easy to lose yourself in the void and the emptiness of living online; and you may even start criticizing everything around you, including yourself. And when you realize you're there, it can feel like it's too late.

But sometimes, you find an influencer or a community online. And they snap you out of it, and help you see things you've been blind to this whole time. There are so many other positives too. For example, I'm speaking fluent English right now, but my parents actually don't. Nor have I ever lived in an English speaking country. How is this possible? Well, through everyday exposure to videos, TikToks, fanfiction etc. Now you almost can't tell the difference between me and some kid from America. Thanks to my language skills I'm exposed to information about politics, society, and world events that every day help me develop my own view of the world. If you use technology right, it could be an incredibly positive influence in your life.

Living without the digital world is near impossible. That's why I cannot emphasize enough the importance of teaching our youth proper ways to interact with it. In my opinion, this should be considered one of the most important parts of parenting today because our future depends on it. Let's not make technology a substitute for a parent. Let's make it a bonding experience instead. I hope that our generation takes this issue seriously so we can work together to build a brighter future.

Thank you."

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