

# Five emerging trends that could change our lives online

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The way we live our lives online is rapidly changing. Artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality and innovations such as blockchain—a kind of digital record for transactions—are set to transform the online world, affecting everything from social media to how people and businesses make money from their creativity.

If you're feeling confused by the pace of change, here's what you need to know about five trends on the cusp of making a major impact.

## 1. Generative AI

AI and the more specific field of machine learning (where software improves at a task with experience) are already used to [personalize the recommendations](#) we get when we shop online, in digital assistants like Alexa and for automated translation of text. The uses for this technology are [only likely to grow](#). There are some innovative uses of AI by businesses that may point to how people will be using the technology in future.

The AI-powered chatbot ChatGPT is a high-profile example. [Microsoft recently invested US\\$10 billion \(£8.2 billion\) investment in the chatbot's parent company](#) showing how seriously these online tools are being taken.

It was seen by some journalists as the start of an ["AI war"](#) between Microsoft and Google. The latter company has been [incorporating AI into its search engine](#) to improve the answers people get. [Jasper.ai](#) is another forward-thinking use of AI. This online service generates written content for blogs, [social media posts](#) and letters.

Meanwhile, Meta, the company that owns Facebook, is working on AI-powered software that can generate video from a text prompt, such as ["teddy bear painting a portrait"](#). This is regarded as the next step on from [online tools](#) that generate images from text, such as [DALL-E](#) and [Stable Diffusion](#).

## 2. The metaverse

The "[metaverse](#)" is intended to make the [online world](#) more like the real one, through the use of [virtual reality](#) (VR) headsets. Instead of interacting with a two-dimensional profile on social media, you would don your VR headset to be represented by an [avatar in a 3D virtual world](#). Your avatar would be able to communicate with other ones in a space modeled on the real world. Online shops could take the form of 3D virtual spaces so customers could browse in much the same way they would in their everyday lives.

A new wave of advanced VR headsets could help facilitate the metaverse. These could include advanced features such as eye tracking—which can make interactions with 3D worlds more instant and realistic—and [facial expression detection](#), which would ensure 3D avatars replicate their users' demeanors. [Apple](#) and Qualcomm are developing new VR headsets that could launch in 2023, but details of their features are being kept under wraps.

[YouTube](#) and [Meta](#) are both building libraries of [360-degree video](#) and images, as well as computer-generated objects and backgrounds that can be used to build the 3D environments that your avatar would explore in these virtual worlds.

### **3. Digital certificates**

The owners of 360-degree video and computer-generated landscapes designed for use in the metaverse will want to sell their digital creations. To prevent unauthorized use, a kind of token called an NFT can provide these items of digital content with certificates of authenticity and ownership.

These [non-fungible tokens](#) allow the content to be bought and sold with confidence, something that's increasingly happening with the use of cryptocurrency. In 2022, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter all

introduced NFTs to their user and advertiser bases. [Visa](#) and [Mastercard](#) have also made buying NFTs possible with their credit and debit cards.

Despite a recent [drop in the NFT market](#), [forecasts by the US stock exchange Nasdaq](#) suggest the tokens could perform well in 2023.

## 4. Blockchain

A kind of digital record, or ledger, called a [blockchain](#) could help underpin private networks of people online, providing a safe space for them free from trolls, stalkers and fraud. Permission to view information can be restricted to a small number of people and the record of activity provided by blockchain can't be changed. This means any unauthorized activity on the network is instantly traceable.

And because information is stored across a network of computers rather than a single server, it is more difficult to hack. An example of an emerging type of online community that could make use of blockchain is a [DAO \(decentralized autonomous organization\)](#). These networks have discarded the top-down management used elsewhere in favor of a more democratic form of governance with no central authority.

A social platform called Mastodon shares many aspects with DAOs. It was recently in the news when [more than a million users](#) fled Twitter to the platform in the wake of Elon Musk's takeover.

## 5. 'Workfluencers'

Businesses have taken note of the rise of social media influencers and are adopting their approach to reach target audiences. They are making use of what's called an employee advocate, or "workfluencer."

Companies have realized that employees' social media profiles and posts

may better convey the brand than corporate accounts.

When crafted thoughtfully, [social media](#) posts by employees can seem significantly more authentic to other users than corporate PR. People have grown more honest about day-to-day work life, rather than only producing stories on professional milestones and achievements.

Organizations are likely to build procedures to encourage teams and employees to communicate and distribute material on the company's behalf.

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