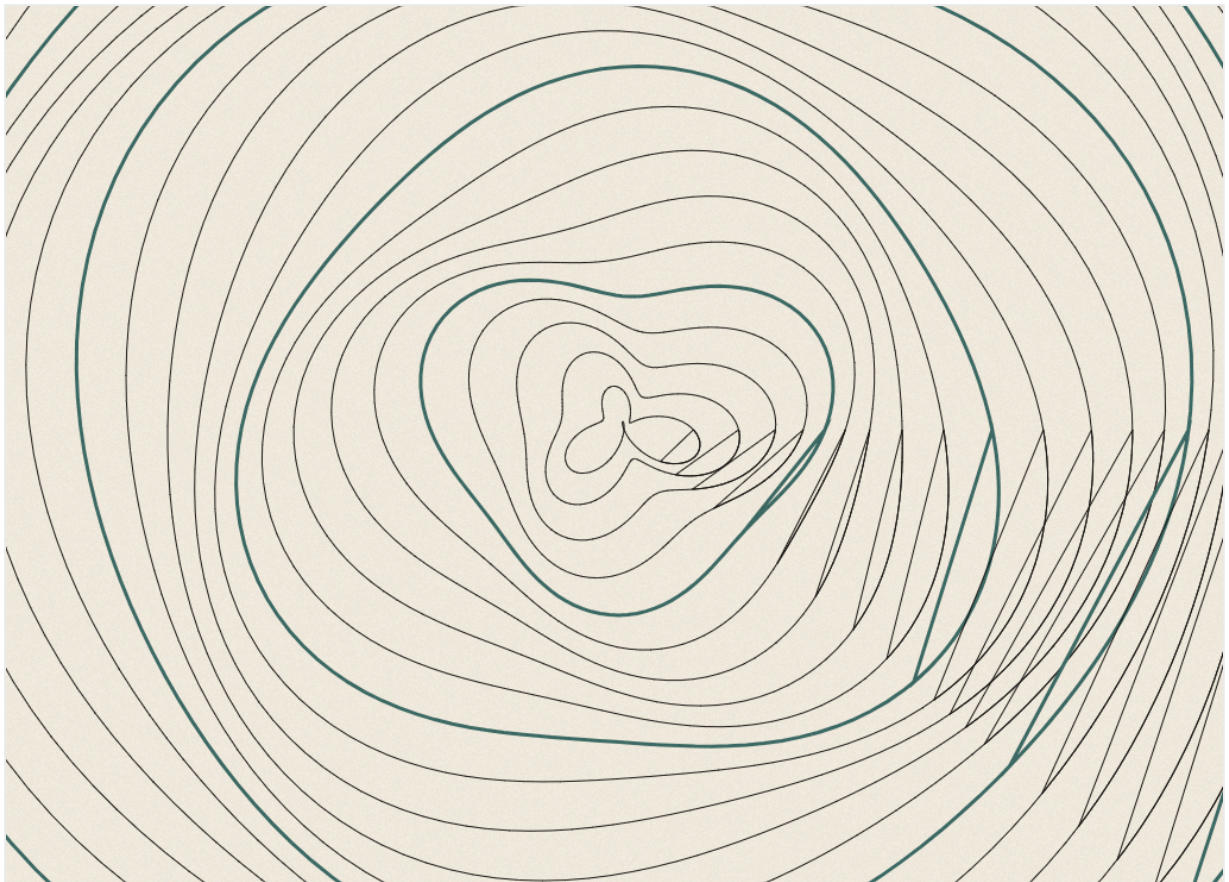


History

The Sisyphean Cycle of Technology Panics

Novels, radio, comics, video games: each was going to ruin a generation. Each panic forgot the last, and we keep rolling the same boulder up the same hill.

By Emmanuel Awosika ■ December 9, 2025 ■



Every generation is certain that a new medium is destroying the young, and every generation believes it is the first to notice. The certainty is sincere and the amnesia is total, which is why the same panic runs on a loop, wearing a different costume each time and forgetting all its previous performances.

The pattern is old enough to be comic once you see it laid out. In the eighteenth century the alarming new technology was the novel, which was going to fill women's heads with fantasy and ruin their capacity for real life. Then it was the waltz, then the penny dreadful, then radio, which would rot children's attention and pull them from their homework. In the 1950s comic books drew a full moral crusade, complete with congressional hearings and public burnings, on the theory that they bred delinquency. Then television, the great pacifier that would produce a generation of passive idiots. Then video games and violence. Then social media. The script barely changes. Only the object rotates.

What makes the cycle Sisyphean is not that the concerns are always baseless, because they are not entirely. Each new medium does change how people spend their time and attention, and some of those changes are worth arguing about. What makes it futile is the refusal to learn from the identical episode one turn earlier. The comic-book panic produced a censorship regime and a wave of certainty that was later recognized as overblown, and almost none of that memory survived to temper the television panic, which in turn taught the video-game panic nothing.

The structure of each panic is remarkably consistent. A new medium becomes popular with the young faster than adults can follow. The unfamiliarity reads as danger. A few motivated experts supply alarming studies, the press amplifies the scariest version, and a moral entrepreneur or two builds a career on the crusade. Legislation is

proposed, sometimes passed, and then the technology becomes ordinary, the children who consumed it grow into unremarkable adults, and the whole thing is quietly forgotten just in time to be repeated.

Recognizing the cycle is not the same as declaring every worry invalid, which would be its own kind of laziness. The point is to raise the bar. If your concern about a new technology is indistinguishable in structure from the concern your grandparents had about the one before, arriving with the same certainty, the same studies, and the same forgetting, that is a reason to check yourself before joining the crusade. The boulder has been rolled up this hill many times. It is worth knowing that before you put your shoulder to it again.