

Those meddling kids! The Reverse Scooby-Doo theory of tech innovation comes with the excuses baked in | Nieman Journalism Lab

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There's a standard trope that tech evangelists deploy when they talk about the latest fad. It goes something like this:

1. Technology XYZ is arriving. It will be incredible for everyone. It is

basically inevitable.

2. The only thing that can stop it is regulators and/or incumbent industries. If they are so foolish as to stand in its way, then we won't be rewarded with the glorious future that I am promising.

We can think of this rhetorical move as a Reverse Scooby-Doo. It's as though Silicon Valley has assumed the role of a Scooby-Doo villain — but decided in this case that he's actually the hero. (“We would've gotten away with it, too, if it wasn't for those meddling regulators!”)

The critical point is that their faith in the promise of the technology is balanced against a revulsion towards existing institutions. (The future is bright! Unless *they* make it dim.) If the future doesn't turn out as predicted, *those meddlers* are to blame. It builds a safety valve into their model of the future, rendering all predictions unfalsifiable.

This trope has been around for a long time. I teach it in my history of the digital future class, with examples from the '90s, '00s, and '10s. It's still with us in the present day. And lately it has gotten *intense*.

[...]

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