
How New Technology Is Making Us Lazy

Recent tech editorials have queried the problems surrounding e-scooters and their potential urban and health hazards. Reading about these accidents—some of which are quite alarming—has made me think about how new technology has become the site of two contrary sentiments: anxiety and capitalistic enterprise. On the one hand, the use of e-scooters is not divorced from the push of capitalism to produce, market, and sell these products to an increasingly curious public. On the other, there is the rise of anything new and anxiety of the new. As with e-cigarettes, this anxiety is not unfounded, but with e-scooters, recent data shows that many of the accidents would be avoidable if only 80 percent of e-scooter riders would wear a helmet.

E-scooters in the EU are now facing the same regulation as scooters such American company, Lime, which operates in the 170s are pushing back against recent legislation in the Netherlands, Ireland, and the UK where e-scooters are illegal to use on public streets. In fact, what is emerging from discussions in recent months is that these devices need to be regulated to protect both the user and the public. But what does this mean for the contradictory cultural clash emerging from the flooding of the market with new technology devices? Should there be some regulatory bodies to overseas the all-too-quick adoption of products that are leaving teenagers in the US on life-support after vaping or dozens hospitalized because someone ran them over with an e-scooter? Or are accidents just part of the well-known historical process of capitalistic ventures?

Ismail ibn Hammad al-Jawhari (died c. 1003–1010), was a Kazakh Turkic scholar from Farab (Otrar) in Transoxiana (today southern Kazakhstan) who attempted to fly using two wooden wings and a rope. Leaping from the roof of a local mosque in Nishapur (today in Iran), al-Jawhari plunged to his death. Franz Reichelt, the inventor of the “coat parachute” (a precursor to the parachute), jumped off the Eiffel Tower expect-ing this con-trap-tion to act save him. It didn't. And last year, Elaine Herzberg was killed by a driverless Uber vehicle in Tempeh, AZ, a case now believed to be the first case of death by self-driving technology. History is replete with errors of science and engineering failures. But to the degree that vaping and scooters have hit the market with products that prove to be a public danger, we have never come in touch with such alarming numbers of injuries and fatalities before. Might it be that our enthusiasm for new technology as a culture is eliding the necessary safety checks that almost every other product would have to endure if it were not for the “fad factor”?

And the paradox deepens for all these recent tragedies are resulting from products that are perceived to be “not as dangerous as cigarettes” and “safer than motorcycles” despite any scientific research to prove such claims. It is as if the free market while requiring drug companies to undertake extensive testing regimes before putting new pharmaceutical products on the market, has lowered the bar for any new technology with a promise to rewind the past.

Hemp products are being marketed at an alarming rate even though the Mayo Clinic has recently published on this subject stating clearly that there is a “lack of solid scientific research conducted” on these products. This means that the marketplace has served many recent new tech fads in disseminating fiction about the potential “benefits” of these new products. But

because these products which span from seemingly harmless oils to topical gels lay claim to an array of health benefits that rely on the trope of “age-old wisdom” and traditional cultures which may or may not have used such products, these new tech fads often slip past oversight agencies such as the FDA in the US.

Certainly, we are witnessing the ushering forth of old-world fads ranging from hemp products flooding the market in recent months to scooters—both electric and non-electric—having a comeback since the millennium. Many of the latest tech developments seem to mirror pre-tech machinery and social systems with a twist to earlier social and technological models: there is an element of danger, at times masquerading as safety, added into the mix. While many get around town on e-scooters, scooters, and hoverboards that may or may not have passed safety tests, the rest of society is walking about town as potential targets for the many devices that have escaped the scrutiny of safety certificates.

There is also the added dimension of how new tech has affected the scene of employment today as to how creative types today are eluding the twentieth-century “employee model.” Instead, many millennials are returning to the pre-twentieth century models of employment, the “make a job” style of employment as they eke out a living reinventing the self in a climate of sink-or-swim. As a result of this new economy, new-gen trailblazers lay claim to a self-employment model that encourages the dream of becoming the YouTube millionaire, Graham Stephen, who drinks ice coffee while making his millions or of becoming an overnight sensation by trading currencies (also known as Forex or foreign exchange). As we are having our spam boxes filled with claims of “get-rich-quick” schemes through the crypto-market in recent years, more recently is the latest boom of testimonials from individuals who have become a “success” at online currency trading. But all of this recycles the same tropes of old without understanding that you can’t simply take a crash course on currency trading with Forex Academy to become a millionaire next week. Many of these new tech additions to the economy, smell of snake oil from another era.

The reality is that new technology transport might not be any safer than YouTube millions are easy to come by. In fact, both rather make us out to be a culture teetering on immaturity as we have pipe dreams of the unrealistic while we scoot by our friends as if adolescents.

We are sold a clean bill of health on new technology, but rarely do we consider if the flooding of the market with new technology is good for our bodies or our minds. While we believe that new tech is useful for advancing our culture, the underbelly of such a proposition is that such technology might actually be pushing us into a backward direction towards mass delusion and physical danger.