

Youth and New Media:  
A Develcology Agent-Based approach to U.S. Comics History (ca. 1890-1960).

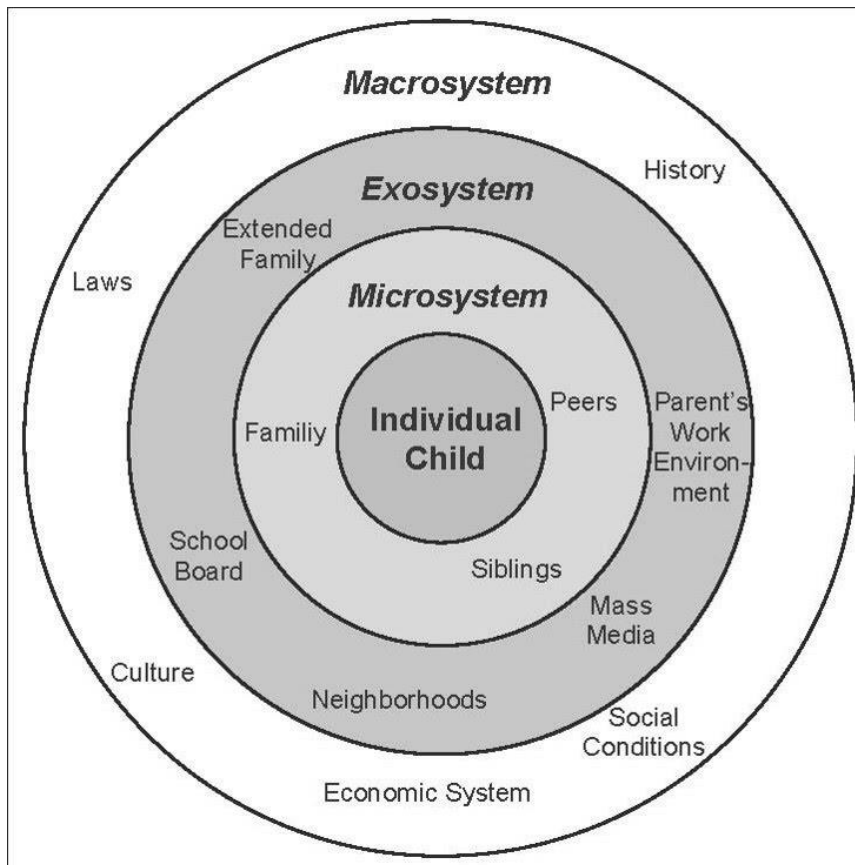
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**Abstract**

The relationship between youth and new media has been central in the integration of these innovative technologies into our cultural and production systems. As new media, Comics productions entered the public sphere in the late XIX c., only to overextend its presence by the late 40's. Its connection with younger audiences, the prevalent youth delinquency, and major moral and security worries of the decade shaped the push against the medium. This resulted in a censorship code that crashed comics business operation size and diversity, as it markedly constrained the pluralistic expression of their narratives and art into a limited family-centric scope. Among all the historiographic work on comics, historians recognize the relevance of inter-generational contributions (e.g., the appearance of comics magazines were driven by generations of the Progressive Era, while baby boomers led the audience for the consequent golden age; then the same individuals as adults with disposable income revamped comics and the second-hand or collectors' markets). We propose that to explain the U.S. comic book market history (and how it relates to today's adoption of New Media), it is essential to understand how comics gained traction with younger audiences. Particularly the development of these youth generations with the comics industry, and the most important aspect of children's environment: their guardians. Parents were the major mobilizers of the public attack on comics and their negative influence on children. We borrow on Bronfenbrenner's Develcological framework (Shelton, 2019) to develop an agent-based model that is aware of individual development and environmental determinants. The model aims to reproduce the macrosystem behavior of youth comics consumption and their parents' activity leading to the Comics Code in 1954. The model attempts to reproduce the market dynamics by modeling the microsystem of child-child and child-guardian interactions, and the meso-system between child(children) and comic producers. This type of agent-based approach allows for a computational implementation of the environmental theory of child and individuals development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which presents a holistic theory to model the reciprocal development of individuals and their societal environments. On the macro level, the model is calibrated and validated using available U.S. Census data (2023) and production data on comic books between 1900 and 1969 (GCD, 2023). Model results will show a working computational model that reproduces the historical demand (sales size and diversity) and public discourse against comics producers. Several explorations of counter-factual simulation settings can be presented to show the Develcological framework benefits to survey market dynamics.

**Keywords:** Cultural History, Cultural Production, Develcology, Comics Studies, ABM

Figure 1 - An Ecological Model of Child or Individual ([Source](#)).



Actors to be modeled and their position in terms of the figure above. The actors to be represented in the Agent-Based model are Consumers, Producer firm, Guardians/Parents (Advertisement firms). A key dimension for Bronfenbrenner's approach is change, or the pass of time and how these levels adapt. So, a big arrow in the Z dimension should always be considered in the representation of Figure 1.

Individual: Comics consumers, from child to adult (development).

Microsystem:

Socialization: Parent-individual, Individual-peers (siblings).

Consumption: Media-child/individual

Production: Comic producer-Advertisement, Comic producer-Individual

Mesosystem:

Public sphere: Parent-media (newspapers/articles/"Seduction of the Innocent")

Guardian communities: Parent-Parent, Teacher-Parent (PTA)

Competition with other media: Comics-Cinema, Comics-Radio

Macrosystem:

Business history: The rise and fall of Comics Market.

Cultural history: Intergenerational relationship of Individual/Comics.