

Communication has been central to the human experience for hundreds of years. It continues to evolve – from verbal storytelling to handwritten letters, radio broadcasts, social media posts and texting. As these forms of communication develop, users can access content faster and at a larger scale than ever before and knowledge from across the world just is few clicks away.

This vast network of content in the digital space has put journalism, the reporting of news and stories from around the world, at a crossroads: continue to share their information through print content, or move completely online.

In the past, journalists have exclusively used print materials to communicate their stories to readers. By the early 1800s, newsprint gained rapid popularity as industrialization enabled mass production of daily papers, allowing distribution to a larger audience.

But as modern technology has developed in the form of television news broadcasts and later social media platforms, many publications have shifted their attention to attracting online readers, with some moving away from print entirely.

Jim Streisel, a high school journalism teacher at Carmel High School in Carmel, Indiana, has experienced this shift in journalism firsthand, as his student's publication, HiLite, has gone completely digital after losing the funding to print.

In the transition, Streisel and his students have found positives in going digital as they adapt to the constant accessibility of online journalism.

"People may not see the story the first day you publish it, but they might see it two or three days later," Streisel said. "Whereas with print, once it's gone, they [readers] have to go find it somewhere if they can, but with online it's always there."

Digital publishing also allows students to experiment with new mediums of communication, which are not viable in print.

"One other benefit we've had as a website is that if you go fully online, it opens up a whole new set of tools, multimedia, video, interactive stuff, and with only doing print, you can't do any of that," Streisel said.

While these benefits provide journalists the opportunity to develop more diverse skill sets, Paly journalism teacher Paul Kandell notes that print journalism offers students a unique opportunity to receive a tangible product they helped to create.

"The students clearly like working with the print product, whether or not it's received with the same appreciation as in previous generations," Kandell said. "But we seem to be in a kind of holding pattern now, where the product is appreciated enough and the students like producing it enough that we're going to stick with it for a while."

Similarly, Senior Dan Honigstein, the In-depth editor of Gunn High School's print publication, The Oracle, and a former contributor to the exclusively online publication, Midpeninsula Post, believes print can be more rewarding for journalism students.

"Daily papers like New York Times print every day, but it is special for a school newspaper to print once a month," Honigstein said. "For the students, looking out for it on distribution day is exciting because everyone's reading it and there's more student interaction, as opposed to everybody reading the stories isolated on their own screens."

Though many students prefer to produce in print, Kandell acknowledges that teaching digital skills is crucial to setting up students for future success.

"We'd be irresponsible as journalism teachers if we were not also giving students digital tools at the same time," Kandell said. "Print is going the way of the photography dark room."

In contrast, Celina Lee, news editor for The Paly Voice, which operates exclusively online, feels that digital journalism gives her the same gratification as print, just in a different form.

"When you write an article, you design something and then you get to see it," Lee said. "You get to see a tangible outcome of your work, but at the same time, I'd argue that I can also just see what I do online."

Digital reporting also offers information to be communicated at a much faster pace, which modern consumers look for in their media consumption.

"A downside of digital media is that it can support confirmation bias."

Dan Honigstein, Gunn senior



"The main difference is that print publications often think of themselves only as on a six-week or nine-week timetable," Kandell said. "That is completely anathema to the way consumers want to digest their news or receive news now. They want it immediately."

This immediate consumption of digital news exposes consumers to large quantities of content, but exclusively consuming news online can often restrict a reader within their interests and mindset.

"A downside of digital media is that it can support confirmation bias more," Honigstein said. "Readers are more likely to click on stories that cover topics they already know about rather than completely new ones."

In the past, newsprint has been able to dictate what the public focuses on through printing relevant stories, which, according to Stanford communications professor Theodore Glasser, has given a select number of publications power to influence public perceptions.

"Newspapers set an agenda by virtue of their design," Glasser said. "Big and bold headlines above the fold signal a newsroom's judgment about what belongs at the top of the day's agenda. There's nothing analogous in the digital domain. In the absence of a juxtaposition of stories, digital journalism weakens the role the press plays in influencing the quality of public discourse."

Because of the sheer amount of digital content, many publications compete for users' attention through creating eye-catching content. Because of this, journalist and Paly Media Arts Program founder Esther Wojcicki notes that exaggerated content can be more prevalent online.

"[Digital media] impacts the journalism industry a lot, because most reporters

are writing headlines and stories for clicks," Wojcicki said. "That encourages more sensationalism."

Since publications need funding for their products, news that attracts readers is valuable, even if it isn't completely true.

"Print is going the way of the photography dark room."

Paul Kandell, Paly Journalism Adviser

"Maybe the news isn't 100% fake, but... it probably emphasizes a part of the news that was not really meant to be emphasized," Wojcicki said. "I, unfortunately, think the controlling factor here in the US, well in the world, is money; people want to make money on this and that's what's contributing to print newspapers going down."

Economical issues, a problem that journalists have been struggling with for decades, are a driving force in print

publications moving online. "Newspaper publishers have been struggling to devise a 'business model' that makes sense; so far, nothing looks very promising," Glasser said. "It's been difficult to dislodge thinking that, for two centuries, equated a free press with free enterprise, but more and more newsrooms are looking beyond the marketplace for opportunities for success. Philanthropy is now playing an important role in American journalism."

The Palo Alto Weekly has recently become a non-profit organization, which means it can now receive tax-deductible donations, according to chief executive editor of Embarcadero Media Adam Dawes.

"We decided to become a nonprofit because our historical revenue has come from advertising, which has supported the compa-

ny for more than 40 years, and that revenue has been declining,” Dawes said. “That has affected local news all over the nation and all over the world, as things have moved online and the business landscape has changed, and so we needed to find new sources of revenue.”

In contrast, carving out funding for publications within the government could ease financial needs, but could cause issues with ensuring a free press.

“Another approach would involve state subsidies as a way to insulate journalism from market forces,” Glasser said. “This has more appeal in Europe, especially among some of the Scandinavian countries, than in the United States. First Amendment implications need to be considered with regard to American proposals for a role for the state in creating and sustaining a free and independent press.”

Digital advertising has also decreased demand for print advertising, which Stanford communications professor and director of the Stanford journalism program James Hamilton believes has greatly decreased income for print publications.

“The rise of advertising online has reduced the desirability of advertising in print,” Hamilton said. “That has radically reduced classified advertising in print, retail advertisements, and other advertising that once accounted for 80% of newspaper print revenues.”

The lack of print ads and the subsequent lack of funding have caused staffing shortages for many publications.

“Online ads don't in any way produce enough to cover the costs of that print ad used to bring in in terms of percentage of revenue for a publication staff,” Kandell said. “Most of those expenses probably would be in the staffing itself, the human resources, and we just can't afford to keep journalists around on what online publications bring in. Print publications were a better model for that.”

This decline in the scale of print publications has influenced modern-day reporting and the resources that journalists have to cover stories that impact their communities.

“We have so many fewer journalists now than we did 10 or 15 years ago,” Kandell said. “It was cataclysmic. What happened to newsrooms and our democracy in our culture will pay a price for a very, very long time.”

As for print completely vanishing from relevance, Hamilton believes that it will continue to have some value for the time being.

“I think print may continue to exist for a while since a segment of the population, particularly older readers, prefers the ability to

read a print newspaper,” Hamilton said. “That demographic will decline over time, however, and more and more reading will shift online.”

In terms of education from print versus digital journalism, Wojcicki believes that the benefits from physical print offer students a contrasting experience to digital media.

“If you compare your experience reading a newspaper versus seeing it online, you'll see it's really different,” Wojcicki said. “So if I were teaching today at Paly, I would have students compare a newspaper they read in hardcopy, maybe the Mercury News and the Mercury News Online version, and see how that impacts their reading.”

Journalism educator and president of the Journalism Education Association, Valerie Kibler, emphasizes the importance of media literacy as a skill taught in the classroom.

“I would like to think that, in the education world, we are reverting back hopefully to teaching kids how to use media literacy to tell the difference between what is fact and what is fair,” Kibler said.

In journalistic education, Streisel believes shifting online may offer a new platform for students to showcase their skills without financial pressures.

“I think that it [the switch from print to digital publications] is already happening in some smaller schools because their budgets aren't nearly as high, and having the ability to put things online is a nice, accessible way for them to continue to do great journalism,” Streisel said. “It's a kind of leveling field; schools with big budgets can make slick-looking print publications, but when everything goes online you just have the same design software.”

Streisel's students also considered the environmental impacts of printing their magazine frequently, which has also been a concern for some in the Palo Alto community, including Olivia Stinson, a Castillija senior and media team head of the Palo Alto Student Climate Coalition.

“In general, if we look at all of the companies and everybody in the world, I don't think that the news organization is the main contributing factor to climate change,” Stinson said. “But I do think that every industry does play a big part and that it is something that we should still be considering.”

To outweigh these envi-

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Ted Glasser, Stanford Communications Professor

ronmental impacts, Stinson suggests reading print publications for longer periods.

“If you read the newspaper on a piece of paper for a certain amount of time, like 30 minutes to an hour, you actually outweigh the environmental balance of reading online versus on paper, because when you read something online, it takes a lot of water and other resources to run the servers,” Stinson said.

These resources can also be costly to publications, paying for the materials needed to produce in print.

“Newspapers require an expensive infrastructure — tons of paper and ink, costly printing presses, people to run the presses, fleets of vehicles to distribute the newspaper,” Glasser said.

Although this economic necessity poses a challenge, news and stories that bind cultures and communities together will continue to be necessary in a growingly divided world, and journalism's ability to communicate is crucial to providing accessibility to current events going forward.

“I've been doing this almost 30 years, seeing a lot of change in that time,” Streisel said. “The one thing that has never changed, and probably never will, is this ability to tell good stories... [the] elements of news are never going to change.”

The future of journalism lies in the hands of the next generation: the people who will continue to tell the stories of our global community.

“New generations of journalists will either adapt to changes in journalism or they will change those changes,” Glasser said.

The evolution of journalism will continue to change how we consume news, but Streisel emphasizes that stories will continue to be relevant to the public.

“You're starting to see sort of an erosion of the print side of journalism,” Streisel said. “The journalism itself is not going away. It's still there. It's still very strong. People always have that need for professionals to tell good stories and to share information. I think that that's never going to die.”

