

With the rise of digital media and online social media platforms, is print media truly dead?

Print media like magazines have been a staple in the lives of generations, whether there are magazines or newspapers they were the source for culture, entertainment, and news. However, in the last two decades we have seen a rise in technology in many sectors, including media. Digital media has caused a mega cultural shift in our media consumption habits. Oligopoly of tech giants have taken majority revenue in advertising in the sector and created an addictive source to get information and entertainment from. With the likes of Instagram, TikTok and popularity of online subscriptions, legacy media have become an afterthought to society. This paper will discuss the impact digital media has had in the decline of print media, specifically magazines, over the years and what the future may look like for the magazine industry in its entirety.

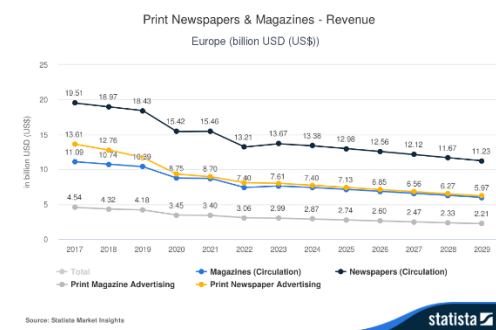
The origin of Magazines can be traced back to the 15th century, under the name “The Treasure Hidden Secrets” (G, 2023) which focused on news and cultural events of the Elizabethan era it evolved into women’s diaries, targeting a female-centric audience during Queen Anne's reign. This pioneered the blend of educational and culturally entertaining magazines like Elle, GQ, and Vogue that we have today. Fast-forward to 1872, the birth of magazine American Vogue from its inception, according to founder Arthur Baldwin Turnure, its ethos was to celebrate the “ceremonial side of life”. This meant writing about the luxuries of life, social etiquette, fashion, and sports for their male audience. It was essentially a lifestyle magazine depicting the socialites of New York. This was not, however, their demographic of consumers: it was the middle class (G, 2023). Magazines like Vogue became an escapism for these women, away from mundanity to high society and fashion. This is still a common aim for magazines in the 21st century but with the rise of social media, specifically Instagram releasing in 2010, over the recent years it has become a slight threat to the print market.

Initially Instagram was in only the photography market and it grew exponentially in a decade, now having 2.2 billion active monthly users (Iqbal, 2024). Instagram contributed to the societal shift of our media consumption habits, as it became a place for ordinary people to post about their interests and build a community of like-minded people. This opened a space in the job market for creatives in junction with Instagram introducing ads. This served as print media’s second and more alarming threat, as Instagram was not only in the photography market like magazines, but were now in the advertising market, in a platform that had a reach of 2.2 billion people in an extremely fast rate.

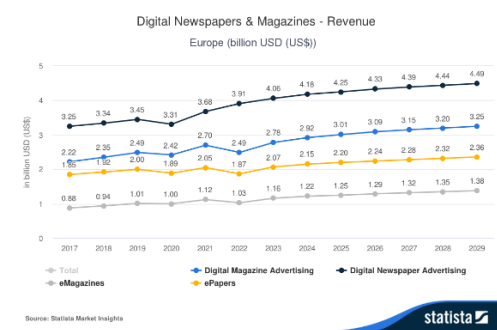
On top of that, introducing ads allowed these influencers to promote companies’ products on their Instagram page in return for commission when any user purchases through their link to the product.

In addition to this, we have seen that the rise of digital media has created a new definition of trendsetting. Varazdin posits that fashion content creators have “cast the common consumer in the role of a fashion content producer” (Varazdin,2022,3.5), suggesting the people with a community following are the ones who set trends; something once determined by the upper-echelon and spread through magazines, is now being determined by people outside elite circles. This concept is perpetuated by Professor Frances Corner, head of the London College of Fashion as he says “The evolution of technology and social media has allowed all consumers to have a voice,” (Kay,2017). The digital age has given media consumers more agency, in deciding what they like and what is “in”, unlike magazines. Which brings the question of the relevance of print media in a digital world and if it can still survive in the future?

Most magazines, following the cultural shift of digital technology, have transitioned to digital copies, as well as still printing physicals, however at a much lower rate. There are even new magazines being birthed solely as digital magazines, like Welsh Lifestyle magazine ‘KlatMagazine’, whilst legacy magazines have even moved to digital copies completely, an unfortunate example being glamour magazine announcing in 2018 they will no longer print monthly issues and instead to be “doubling down on digital” (BBC, 2018). This decline of print media is further examined in the two graphs showing the revenue for printed and digital media.



graph 1



graph 2

Analse the table. Discuss the legal changes in Wales as the decline continues – book council fundings cut.

Graph 1 shows print magazines’ circulation revenue has been declining steadily from \$11.09 billion in 2017 to \$7.61 billion in 2024 and estimated to decrease to \$6.27 billion by 2028 – a drop of nearly 44%. In contrast, the eMagazines revenue is significantly lower (\$0.88 billion in 2017) yet a gradual rise to \$1.38 billion. This suggests that readers of physical copies are cancelling subscriptions and moving to digital alternatives which interestingly correlates with graph 2’s increase of eMagazine advertising, insinuating

advertisers view digital platforms as beneficial, most likely because they can capitalise on attention economy more efficiently (Jang & Pasek, 2015, p. 581).

It can be argued that although print is declining, it is still making more money than digital. On the contrary, one must consider the price difference of digital and print magazine subscription. According to British Vogue's subscription page "A digital subscription is £24.99" with first year being "Billed as £12" for new consumers. Whilst for the print magazines are "Billed as £24 for one year. Renews automatically for £39.99/year." Customers may prefer digital for its affordability and convenience: digital media is easily accessible for consumers, as they can source it whenever they want and can go back to previous issues all on one device, wherever they. And can do this at a 1.6 times cheaper rate. (You can even look on the magazine brand's Instagram page for free!)

It was reported that Condé Nast, which publishes a host of magazines including Vogue and GQ, shut down its regular print publications of Self magazine and Teen Vogue (BBC, 2018) after being hit with a £14 million annual loss (Sweney, 2019). The ample amount of evidence suggests the decline of print media entirely, yet in this dying market leading magazine brands like Vanity Fair, Vogue and GQ manage to remain extremely profitable in their world.

The aforementioned top magazines in the industry all carry a prestigious status of luxury and timelessness, which on the surface would make it difficult to stray from the tradition of print without "cheapening their brand" (Wilberg, 2018). Nonetheless, most have expanded to Instagram as a form of advertising. The rise of the digital age forced traditional "coffee table" magazines to change the relationship with their consumer; a new market was born where people saw social media as a refreshing platform to connect with others that share their true lifestyle, which most users (not being the of the 1%) actually related to. It encapsulated a generation that was less interested in outdated form of advertising – perceived as "over-planned and misleading" (Wilberg, 2018). This made the likes of Vogue and GQ seek different groups in society – as being a lifestyle brand is not enough. Let us examine American Vogue: they established sub-magazines such as Vogue business and allowed more non-fashion articles to be published online so it catered a range of people (Rusin, 2019). They established their social media platforms, where a pattern of high-volume content is published, posting a range of photography from editorial covers to casual paparazzi photos. Additionally, their YouTube channel gathering over 15 million subscribers through viral series, "Beauty Secrets" and "73 Questions" involving Hollywood's most influential. This was meant to bridge the gap between the readers and the upper-class lifestyle content Vogue delivers in hopes to make their luxury lifestyle content seem more relatable to the readers by humanizing the a-list celebrities they write

about, making their life seem not too far from our own but keeping their elitist status (Wilberg 2018).

However, this is something that is unrealistic for most magazine companies to replicate without the Capitol that Vogue/Condé Nast has. Small independent magazines are in a worse position now with governments cutting assisted funding that is already difficult to acquire. An example of this is in 2021 the government of England and Wales cut the arts funding from £36 million to £19 million leaving struggling creatives, independent startup magazines, with even less support to establish themselves (Micallef 2021). It also makes these magazine startups resort to a solely, digital magazine to cut costs, regardless of what they want, further proving the digital age has left this dying market with no choice but to conform to the future of digital media.

As convincing as this is, we cannot deny the recent predictions of print media making a comeback. Similarly to the revival of vinyl media in music, there has been a spike of gen Z population buying and collecting physical magazine copies as collectibles. (Hall, 2024). A possible correlation to this is magazines that had once shut down, have made a return, such as The Face Magazine which was a power voice for media in the 80s, closed in in 2004, but was reborn in 2019 after a 15 year hiatus and comeback targeting 18-35-year-olds through culture, music, art etc.(Mcloughlin, 2024). Additionally, consumers are responding to this resurgence with 58 % of brits agreeing they prefer reading a magazine in print (Tobitt, 2022). A possible reason for this surprising statistic is the act of reading something physically in your hands, it steadies the mind more because is outside of attention economy model digital advertisers uses on consumers, and instead it reverts to information economy (Twenge, J.M., Martin, G.N. and Spitzberg, B.H., 2019).

There is a feeling for reading a new printed new issue best described with by editor in chief, InStyle, Laura Brown positing the power of a physical magazine copy “be[ing] stopped by an image, a concept [...] [a] great read that arrests you” (Teller, J. and Drizyte, D.,2023). The experience of the glossy paper, physically turning the page, and framing an iconic front cover is something, I believe digital copies cannot encapsulate. You could sit and be taken to a different world through vibrant colours and textures of a printed magazine, without other pestering mediums competing for the consumers attention – which is something digital media thrives on through digital advertisement. The generations of young adults today – Gen Z – may remember having printed magazines and newspapers in the house all the time, like I do, but now it is not something that is seen constantly around us. You may see the occasional magazine on a coffee table, but it is mostly used as decoration in houses or receptions, and the becomes an outdated issue and not replaced! Moreover, for

those who have rediscovered a love for print magazines, it has become collectible, so the memory attached with it with it has changed to a romanticised nostalgia. This is best said by GQ deputy global editorial director Adam Baidawi, who told Press Gazette “this summer [2022] there was a “romanticised” vision of print-centred magazines that was becoming “less and less sensical”.

To conclude, this paper highlighted the threat of digital and social media is to the future of legacy media from an the economic, social and political view. Due to inevitable cultural shifts there is a clear correlation between the decline of print and the rise gradual increase of digital media. Although we have seen a surge of young people showing interest in print and rebirths of old magazines to print, we are not certain this is not just a wave or trend. Whereas we know that technology definitely not and will only progress each day. Therefore based on the information gathered in this paper it is clear that print media will continue to decline and if managed to have a place in society still, it will be as relic, an appreciation of legacy media, not as a source of entertainment or news.

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