

A L B E R T A
P R E S S C O U N C I L

PRESS RELEASE

May 14th, 2010

Ed Kamps, chair of the Alberta Press Council is pleased to announce that the 2010 Essay Competition Scholarship of \$2,000 is presented to Mr. Marjun A. Parcasio, a grade twelve student at Old Scona Academic High School, Edmonton, AB. Mr. Parcasio has been accepted to the **Joint Honours Baccalaureate in Social Sciences in “History and Political Science (French Immersion)** program offered in English, for the Fall 2010 session at the University of Ottawa, ON.

Marjun’s essay titled:

An Unlikely Partnership: Facebook and the Newspaper in the Modern Era

was judged to be the winning essay over 64 submissions received on the topic:

Facing Up To Facebook: How Does The Traditional Newspaper Survive?

Sixty four essays from Grade 12 students across the province were read and carefully graded by the committee which comprised of David Forbes, chair, public member, Medicine Hat News readership area; Tanis Fiss, public member, Calgary Herald readership area; Gerald Gauthier, press member, Lethbridge Herald and public member, Steven Wright. "It's an interesting process, especially when several people judge the same essays to be good ones out of so many," Forbes said, adding that "the winning essay is the one that best meets the criteria of creativity, style and content. We appreciate the effort made by those who showed a keen interest in the essay topic."



An Unlikely Partnership: Facebook and the Newspaper in the Modern Era

By Marjun A. Parcasio

The unprecedented growth of social networking sites such as Facebook in the early twenty-first century is a testament to the technological revolution that has swept the entire world. However, the increasing popularity of Facebook proves to be an antagonistic challenge to the survival of the traditional newspaper, which has existed since 1605.¹ As the world turns towards a new era on the Internet, the onus is shifted on those in the newspaper industry to adapt and find its place amongst its new competitors. Is this truly the future then? A winner-take-all battle between Facebook and the newspaper, wherein the loser will be lost forever in the hallmarks of history? Melodramatic as it may sound, the challenge itself is real and threatening. In spite of this, the best chances for newspaper survival is not full-on competition with social networking sites and the Internet, but rather a covert but subtle attempt at cooperation. The idea of “newspapers and Facebook hand-in-hand” may seem oxymoronic to some, but the future of the former is determined by how well it can adapt to the paradigm shift in attitudes, beliefs, and values of the modern era. Furthermore, the traditional newspaper must let go of its defying grasp of tradition, as economic and social factors pave the road towards technological integration. While the paper newspaper may potentially become obsolete, it is merely a device through which news is spread. The real challenge is the protection of the value of the news – whether in print or on the web – as a force in our changing society.

The newspaper needs to adapt to the changing circumstances of a rapidly-growing trend towards Internet use coupled with the decreasing popularity of the traditional newspaper to a younger demographic of readers. For many, Facebook has become the newspaper as it provides a quick and easy access to current events through social networking. Proponents of the newspaper claim that while this may be true, the paper provides a comprehensive and more importantly accurate version of events as they unfold. A system of checks and balances may not be possible on social networking sites; however, the accessibility and speed of the news via Facebook is much more appealing for those who normally must wait until the next morning to hear about news happening the day or even several hours previous. For example, news regarding the results of events at the Olympic Games results in a flooding of the Facebook news feed and allows for immediate satiation for those hungry for these results. Regardless of how much the newspaper advertises or prints, they cannot deny that the nature and value of Facebook offers an effective means of communication. However, they can capitalize on these advantages. Newspapers

from around the world, such as the *New York Times*², *South Africa's Mail and Guardian*³, and the *Wall Street Journal*⁴ have expanded their paper on Facebook using the Applications and Pages features as means of appealing to younger readers. Charles McKenzie, an advisor to *The Minaret* at the University of Tampa, acknowledged his success with the use of Facebook, noting that they've had "amazing success," and that "even small online-only summer editions...are getting record hits"⁵. By placing themselves on the Facebook scene rather than battling beside it, newspapers can garner support and readers from a generation that has turned towards the Internet. Those who attempt to fight against Facebook rather than work with it will likely find themselves losing ground in an increasingly technological society.

Newspapers must also be sensitive to sociological and economic factors that affect their support. Attempting to preserve the traditional newspaper for the sake of tradition is an argument doomed to failure; while the newspaper has largely survived the test of time, a new outlook on the future based on a technological society as well as a change of readership needs to be considered. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press gives a startling statistic for traditional paper enthusiasts: only 34% of those polled read the newspaper in print format, well below the numbers ten years ago⁶. One reason for this decline is the lack of appeal for newspapers for younger readers. In fact, the *American Sociological Review* determined that for younger adults, "Facebook is the key site of the moment."⁷ Engagement of a younger demographic is key in our society because in so doing, newspapers ultimately gain the interest of a large portion of the population. Not only that, but papers also ensure economic viability in the struggling market of newspapers. The print industry is suffering with closures and massive job cuts for media giants such as Canwest and Sun Media⁸. Without revisiting the business model to include the Internet and social networking as part of the equation, we will likely see an augmentation of these problems. The solution here is to adapt in order to survive. The newspaper risks being overwhelmed due to the slow pace of its progression. Unless it takes the initiative to take increasingly online-oriented roles similar to that of the *Christian Science Monitor* in the United States, it has no hope in keeping pace with expanding social networking sites like Facebook. The shift towards a modified business model does not promise to be pretty, but in an age of technology such changes are imperative if the traditional newspaper hopes to survive.

Many would claim that the future for newspapers is bleak. By bowing down to the giants of social media like Facebook and Twitter, they argue, we risk losing the value on which journalism was founded on. On the contrary. The changes that are sweeping the world may not appeal to those who uphold the tradition and custom of the traditional newspaper. But holding on to a dying form of media and refusing to broaden the horizons of the newspaper spells disaster. The world may lose the physical manifestation of the newspaper, but they will gain in its place a form of media that is flexible, adaptable, and ultimately appealing for a new set of readers. The principal purpose of the news will never change, for humanity will always seek the knowledge that is parted through the newspaper. The means through which this knowledge is imparted, however, is dictated by the Internet and its subdivisions such as Facebook. By embracing Facebook as an ally rather than an antagonist, the field of journalism will ensure that the newspaper's legacy survives into the future.

Works Cited

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