Opinion

Physical media holds more value now than ever before

By JOANNA FARRELL
Opinion Editor

In the age of subscription this and paywall that, it can be hard to remember what life without these things looked like. When we were kids, we didn't have Netflix on our TVs or YouTube Premium; instead, we had Blockbuster and physical media.

Our parents weren't paying for something that they would never own, especially not monthly. Blockbuster was a pay-per-video, not a $10 charge hitting their bank accounts on a monthly basis.

On average, U.S. consumers are spending nearly $275 per month on subscription services, and fatigue is setting in. People are tired of paying for everything on a monthly basis. Even things that used to be completely free after buying are turning to subscription models. Imagine paying monthly to use a printer, only to have them limit the number of pages that you can print.

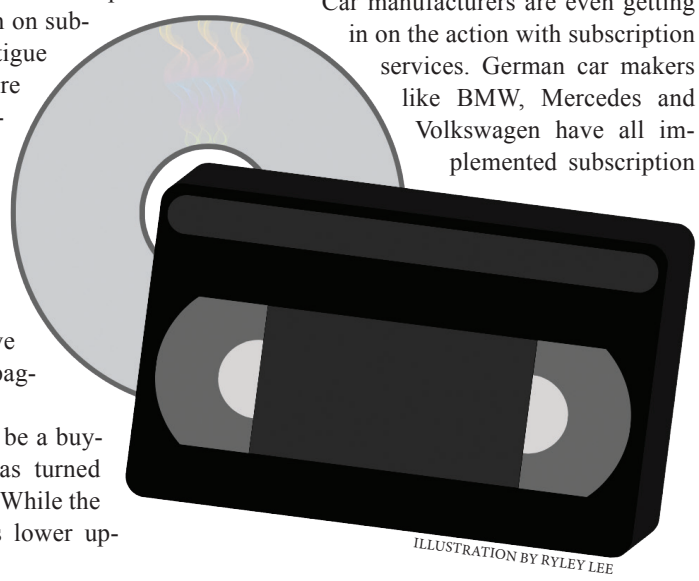

ILLUSTRATION BY RYLEY LEE

Everything that used to be a buy-once type of purchase has turned into a subscription model. While the subscription model offers lower upfront costs, the duration of the subscription often outprices what the initial sticker price would have been in the first place.

Some of the most notable subscription models today are streaming services. Streaming services seem to hold a monopoly over the type of media that not only the U.S., but the world watches, and consumers are tired of it.

I'm sick of these predatory business practices. I can't even buy a pair of leggings and a sports bra without paying for a monthly subscription… I'm looking at you, Fabletics.

Car manufacturers are even getting in on the action with subscription services. German car makers like BMW, Mercedes and Volkswagen have all implemented subscription services for their cars. These services range from allowing access to heated seats to making your car accelerate faster. For cars that already cost as much as an average person's annual income, these things should be included in that price, not a monthly add-on.

All across social media, we're seeing the return of physical media. Media that you can touch and hold. Media that is yours forever once you take it home. It's clear that the general population is nostalgic for a time when every aspect of our lives wasn't being nickel and dimed. When companies were pushing innovative boundaries, instead of the boundaries of our wallets.

Generation Z is heading the charge in a shocking resurgence of vinyls, CDs, DVDs and video games.

Subscription models aren't the only contributing factor in the revival of the media from our childhood. Gamers have been chewed up and spit out recently by gaming companies. Many gamers are complaining about the price they are paying for a digital copy of the game, when it does not include physical ownership of the game. Even if a disc is purchased, it's for digital download, not a transferable game that can be played on multiple consoles interchangeably.

The gaming community has seen a massive increase in retro gaming console purchases so they can play the games they grew up with and experience tangible ownership, without the $60 price tag on a 15-year-old game that only includes a digital copy, which stays with the console. In the end, no console, no game.

Artificial intelligence (AI) slop has also been a driving factor in our generation's push toward a time when real human effort had to be used to make anything. AI has taken over every aspect of our lives. I mean, come on, people are asking ChatGPT what to eat for dinner… we actually can't be for real. But with that, media has taken a huge hit. It's being used to generate art, television shows and everything else that used to be human-made.

Aside from my opinion on the lazy and uncreative nature of the average AI user, this lack of effort and human touch in modern media leads us to yearn for a simpler time, when people could accept an imperfect flyer or handmade craft. When I could order off a menu with pictures of food instead of generated images.

All of these factors have solidified physical media's place in our society. As long as companies are digging deeper into our pockets, gaming companies are selling digital downloads instead of tangible games and AI is replacing any semblance of humanity in business, physical media will forever have a place in our hearts.

Flock cameras invade our privacy

It's time we do something about it

By VIVIAN GAGE
Associate Opinion Editor

This past summer, I returned home from my semester abroad to discover something truly sinister had taken over my neighborhood. At almost every stoplight, outside the elementary school and surrounding all roads leaving my house, new sets of watching eyes had emerged.

Flock cameras had taken over my city in just the few months I was gone.

I could recognize the ominous, sleek black cameras right away, but to many, they seemed entirely unassuming. I mean, what's another camera in a sea of Ring cameras and speed traps? Right?

But that is where the issue lies. Flock cameras are not normal security cameras and should not be treated as such.

"A Flock camera is a license plate reader camera built to identify vehicle details that may help generate investigative leads," according to the Flock website.

Along with your car's plate number, it also captures "attributes like make, model, color, and other visible characteristics."

Minute details of each car are tracked, like the bumper sticker telling others to let you merge or the long scratch on the back left panel that came from hitting your own mailbox (guilty). This data is stored by default for seven days, but police agencies can choose to hold onto it for longer or shorter periods.

The cameras use artificial intelligence to build a network of cars, allowing "participating law enforcement agencies to search the resulting database for vehicles associated with crimes" or to "reconstruct where a vehicle traveled," according to Komo News.

The Flock website states, frequently, that the cameras are not "general-purpose surveillance systems designed to identify people."

Flock claims they focus on vehicles exclusively and aren't designed to track individuals.

That might be reassuring if that were how the cameras were actually used.

The Institute for Justice has identified over 100 incidents of Automatic License Plate Reader (ALPR) abuse, "including romantic stalking, wrongful stops and detentions, non-law enforcement use, and other types of misconduct."

Last May, a sheriff's deputy in Texas searched a data pool of more than 83,000 Flock cameras "to find a woman whose partner alleged she performed a self-administered abortion." The deputy searched through 6,809 camera networks, spanning across state lines. In the Flock search log, he wrote "had an abortion, search for female," as his reason for doing so.

According to the Washington Post, a police chief in Georgia used the cameras to track his ex-girlfriend and her daughter more than 500 times over seven months.

A couple of weeks ago, a 911 director was arrested after she "searched more than 2,500 times for cars belonging to her estranged husband and his new girlfriend."

Concerningly, many of these events were discovered by journalists, not the police departments themselves.

Law enforcement agencies all over the country have jumped at the chance to install Flock cameras over the last few years, but have failed to create the safeguards needed to protect citizens from the officers themselves.

To make matters worse, Flock cameras disproportionately target minority communities.

Professors at Christopher Newport University published a 2026 study in which they mapped over 600 Flock cameras, according to Emerald Book. They discovered that "majority-Black neighborhoods are saturated with surveillance at nearly four times the rate of their majority-white counterparts."

This creates a loop in which the highest number of alerts are generated in minority neighborhoods, justifying police claims that they are simply targeting high-crime areas. As a result, minority groups have to suffer under more surveillance, face a disproportionate amount of police interactions and suffer more from false positives.

Flock isn't right 100% of the time, and when mistakes do happen, it's minority groups facing the bulk of unnecessary arrests and accusations.

Outrage is growing throughout the country about these cameras, and I say it's time we all hop on this hate train before the network grows any larger.

According to The Guardian, there are already 120,000 Flock cameras throughout the U.S. The Atlas of Surveillance reports that in Connecticut, the Cheshire Police Department has 12 Flock cameras, the Milford Police Department has 68 and the Prospect Police Department operates seven. And there are at least 100 ALPR cameras in the City of New Haven, according to Flock Hopper.

Some people are illegally taking these cameras down by hand. Whether it be running into them, covering them in paint, sawing them in half or blocking the lens with stickers, NPR reports that cameras have been vandalized in at least 36 states.



ILLUSTRATION BY CAITLIN MUSSA

Legally, some towns are ridding themselves of Flock cameras in response to community outrage.

Over 149 communities have "canceled contracts, rejected proposed agreements or deactivated existing" Flock cameras, according to NewsWeek. In terms of a more local response, the Milford Board of Aldermen actually voted to pause usage of most of the city's Flock cameras Aug. 27. Outside of the board meeting, protesters chanted and held up signs reading "DeFlock Connecticut," and it seems their presence had quite the effect.

Examples like these prove that citizens, when they organize, actually have the power to fight harmful things happening in their cities.

Flock says communities "shouldn't have to choose between public safety and privacy." The company also says that "everyone deserves to feel safe."

I say communities shouldn't have to live under the threat of constant surveillance. I say that in a country all about freedom, I've never seen so many people give up their privacy so easily. I say that in a nation meant to give power to the people, we're not supposed to take this lying down.

Flock cameras are simply un-American, and it's time we wake up and do something about it.