

7.9: Paywalls and Access to Online News

For many people in the United States and around the world, access to news online is limited by **paywalls**, a method of restricting information to those who pay for it through purchases or subscriptions. Paywalls are now an ever-present feature of today's online news media environment.

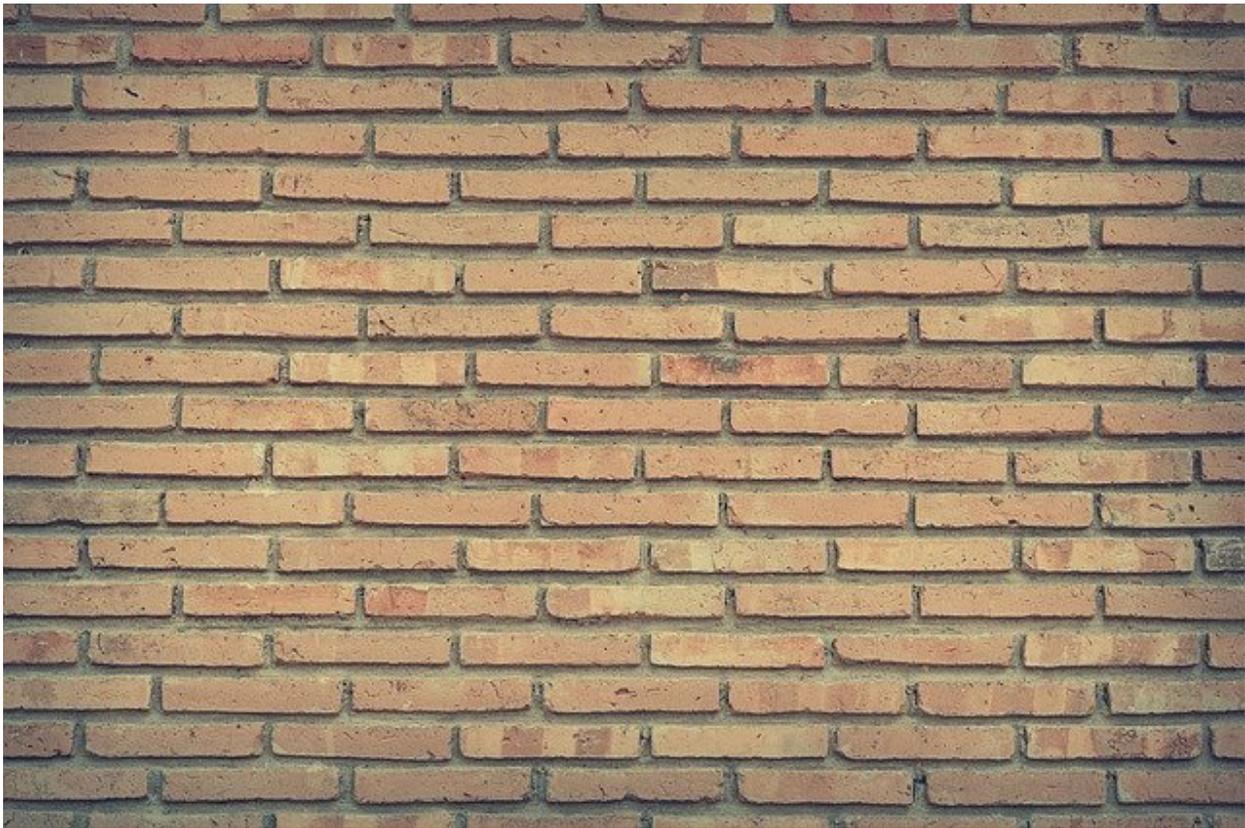


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Researchers from the [Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford \(2019\)](#) looked at four types of news outlets in the United States and Europe (i.e., daily newspapers, weekly newspapers and news magazines, Television news, and digital news) and found three primary types of paywalls across the platforms:

- **Hard paywalls:** no content is free to readers and viewers.
- **Freemium:** a mix of free material with a charge for premium content.
- **Metered:** limited free content each month.

Many major newspapers and news magazines charge readers for some or all of their digital content using a freemium model. *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, for example, require paid

subscriptions to view *all* of their content while making some stories, especially those related to pressing news, free to the public. On *The Washington Post* [Coronavirus page](#) there is a note that states: "The Washington Post is providing our daily live updates, comprehensive guide to the pandemic and our Coronavirus Updates newsletter for free, so that all readers have access to this important information about the coronavirus pandemic."

Paywalls are not the only business model being used by digital news companies. Some choose to make money by collecting, selling, and using data from visitors to their websites. They collect personally identifiable information from readers, share it with third-parties to create targeted advertising profiles, and then populate their news website with targeted ads. The revenue from user data and targeted advertisements allows these news outlets to "freely" share their articles with the public.

Certain right-wing digital news outlets, as well as Fox News Channel ([Fox News is the most watched channel](#) with some 2.14 million viewers in 2021), have the advantage of providing information for free while the *New York Times* and other center-leaning sources provide access to information behind different types of paywalls.

The implications of pay-for-news business practices are huge -- Paywalls mean that unless people are willing or able to pay for news sources, they will get 'locked out' of information gathered by credible and trustworthy journalists. At a time when everyone is encouraged to pay close attention to current events, what happens when people who can't afford subscriptions or purchase articles are restricted from accessing information from news outlets?

In the following activity, you will have the opportunity to evaluate your level of access to different sources of news and information.

Activity: Compare and Contrast Access to Major Newspapers and Television News

- Select 3 news sites from each of the 5 columns of the [AllSides Media Bias Chart](#) (e.g., left, lean left, center, lean right, right).
- Then, go to each news site and click on as many articles as you can until you are stopped and asked to pay (if applicable).
- Consider the following prompts:
 - How many articles could you read without having to pay for access? Why do you think that is?
 - How does the news site make money? How does this influence the way you can access information?
 - Were you able to access more articles in news sites from the left, leaning left, center, leaning right, or right? Why do you think that is?
 - Were you able to access more or less articles from news sites that you believe provide accurate and credible information? Why do you think that is?
 - What does your analysis of these news sites reveal about how credible news is disseminated online?
- Based on your analysis, **create a TikTok or Snapchat video** to inform your peers about how paywalls and access to online news might influence what people think and know to be true about current events.

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Compare and Contrast Access to Major Newspapers and Television News](#)

[Video: Paywalls and Access to online news](#)

Resources

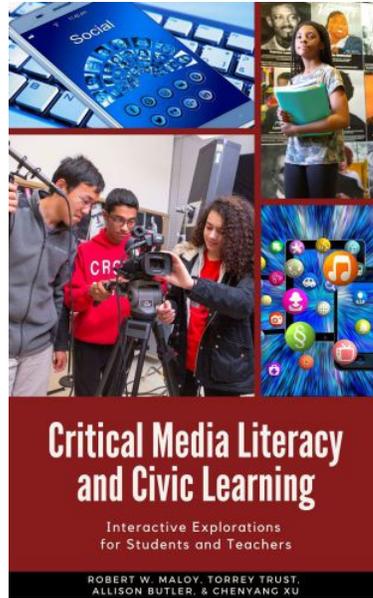
- [Newspapers Fact Sheet](#), Pew Research Center (August, 2021)
- [27 of the Most Incredible Cable TV Subscribers Statistics for 2021](#), TechJury (August 2021)
- [10 Facts about Americans and Facebook](#), Pew Research Center (June 2021)

Connecting to the Building Democracy for All eBook

[Building Democracy for All: Digital News and Social Media](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
 - *Evaluate the benefits and challenges of digital news and social media to a democratic society.* (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) [8.T7.4]
- [ISTE Standards](#)
 - Digital Citizen
 - 2d: Students manage their personal data to maintain digital privacy and security and are aware of data-collection technology used to track their navigation online.
 - Knowledge Constructor
 - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.
 - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
 - Creative Communicator
 - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
 - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
 - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for their intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
 - Safety and Security (CAS.a)
 - Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
 - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
 - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
 - Research (DTC.a)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH6-8.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH9-10.6



Maloy, R. W., Trust, T., , & Xu, C. (2021). *Critical Media Literacy and Civic Learning*. Equity Press. <https://equitypress.org/mediaandciviclearning>