

## Conference Call



## Behind the Paywall: A Cross-Thematic Conference on the Implications of the Budding Market for Paid-for Online News

**Host:** Nordicom

**Venue:** The University of Gothenburg (Sweden)

**Date:** January 23–24, 2019

**Deadline for extended abstracts:** November 15, 2018

**Conference website:** [www.nordicom.gu.se/en/media-research/behind-the-paywall-2019](http://www.nordicom.gu.se/en/media-research/behind-the-paywall-2019)

The past few years have seen a dramatic upsurge in paywalls being erected across the news media landscape. Online news content that was previously circulated for free is now available only to those who are willing to pay for it. The paywalls are an industry response to two interacting market forces: the gradual decline in printed newspaper sales and the increasing dominance of global networking platforms such as Google and Facebook on national and local advertising markets. In order for commercially funded news media outlets to survive, online audience revenue seems to be the most viable way forward.

The implications of what appears to be a fundamental shift from “free-for-all” to “subscribers-only” access to online news, are plentiful. As a research area, it raises important questions regarding such diverse topics as digital business models and digital media policy, journalistic processes and journalistic content, news media audiences and news media use, and – indeed – the democratic function of commercial news media at large. What happens with news media products and what happens with news media audiences when paywalls are erected? What happens with those that chose not to pay? And how does this metamorphosis of the private news media sector affect the role and scope of public service media?

Against the backdrop of these rather fundamental questions, Nordicom (Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research at the University of Gothenburg) invites the international research community to a two-day conference devoted to the paywall phenomenon. Judging by the comparative data available, it appears as if the Nordic countries in general – and Norway and Sweden in particular – are leading the development in the budding market for paid-for online news. The Norwegian newspaper group Amedia with some sixty local newspapers is often described as the most successful actor in terms of attracting online local news media subscribers. In Sweden, the entire market for medium- and high-frequency paid-for local newspapers has presently adopted some kind of pay-model online. According to the cross-national *Digital News Report of 2017* (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism), Scandinavian internet users are at the top in terms of willingness to pay for online news subscriptions. The Nordic region is thus a suitable venue for hosting an international conference on the paywall phenomenon.

The conference is inter-disciplinary and welcomes contributions on themes including, but not limited to:

- Newsroom organization, newsroom processes and editorial decision-making in a paywall environment
- Strategies on converting print subscribers to digital subscribers
- Policy approaches to advancing online business models for commercial news media
- Digital business models for commercial news media
- Paywall solutions and pricing
- Comparisons of paid-for news media and ad-financed news media
- News audience analyses
- News content analyses
- The impact of user-data in paywall setups
- The paywall phenomenon in relation to democratic theory
- Comparisons between reader-financed and ad-financed news

The conference will take place at the University of Gothenburg on January 23–24, 2019. More precise information regarding scheduling and venue will be circulated later.

The deadline for extended abstracts (max 1,000 words) is on November 15, 2018. Abstracts, including contact information to authors, should be submitted to [editors@nordicom.gu.se](mailto:editors@nordicom.gu.se). Notices of acceptance will be given by November 30.

The conference, including food and refreshments, is free of charge for registered participants. *Please note that participants' travel and accommodation expenses will not be covered by the organizer.* (Registration to the conference is binding. No-shows of registered participants will result in a charge of SEK 1,000).

## Publication

The conference will be followed by an open call-for-papers to a 2019 special issue of *Nordicom Review* devoted to the implications of online news media paywalls, edited by Aske Kammer (IT-University of Copenhagen), Carl-Gustav Lindén (University of Helsinki), Jonas Ohlsson (Nordicom) and Helle Sjøvaag (University of Stavanger). The preliminary deadline for full papers is on June 1, 2019.

## Welcome to Gothenburg in 2019!

### For queries, please contact:

Jonas Ohlsson, PhD, Associate Professor  
Director of Nordicom  
Editor-in-Chief of *Nordicom Review*  
[jonas.ohlsson@nordicom.gu.se](mailto:jonas.ohlsson@nordicom.gu.se)