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ARTICLE

Paywall in digital journalism: perceptions and strategies of young Brazilians to "bypass the wall"

Paywall no jornalismo digital: percepções e estratégias de jovens brasileiros para "fugir do muro"

Andrezza Pessoa Carvalho de Souza[1]
Lívia de Souza Vieira[1]

ABSTRACT: *In this article, which results from broader research, we analyze the perceptions of young Brazilians regarding the use of paywalls in digital journalism. The transformation of the journalism industry, driven by the shift from analog to digital, has redefined strategies for the production, distribution, and monetization of information. In this context, the paywall has established itself as an alternative for the financial sustainability of media outlets, but its sociocultural impact and acceptance remain underexplored, especially in Brazil. Based on a qualitative, exploratory approach using a focus group, we sought to understand how young audiences, who are used to consuming online content for free, respond to the access barriers imposed by paid subscriptions. By observing the strategies adopted by the young participants (n = 8) to circumvent the paywall, such as using alternative platforms or abandoning the content, we verified tensions between the right to access information and the need for economic viability of news organizations. As per the results, cost is a significant barrier to subscription. For the participants, exclusive, investigative, specialized, or local and community-focused content increases the stated willingness to pay for news.*

Keywords: *focus group; paywall; digital journalism; business model.*

[1]Universidade Federal da Bahia – Salvador (BA), Brazil.
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RESUMO: *Neste artigo, fruto de pesquisa mais ampla, analisamos as percepções de jovens brasileiros sobre o uso de paywall no jornalismo digital. A transformação da indústria jornalística, impulsionada pela transição do modelo analógico para o digital, redefiniu as estratégias de produção, distribuição e monetização da informação. Nesse cenário, o paywall se consolidou como alternativa para a sustentabilidade financeira dos veículos, mas seu impacto sociocultural e sua aceitação ainda são pouco explorados, especialmente no Brasil. A partir de uma abordagem qualitativa e exploratória, fundamentada em grupo focal, busca-se compreender como o público jovem, habituado ao consumo gratuito de conteúdo on-line, se posiciona diante das barreiras de acesso impostas por assinaturas pagas. Ao observar as estratégias adotadas pelos jovens participantes da pesquisa (n = 8) para contornar o paywall, como o uso de plataformas alternativas ou o abandono do conteúdo, verificamos tensões entre o direito ao acesso à informação e a necessidade de viabilidade econômica das empresas jornalísticas. De acordo com os resultados, o custo é uma barreira relevante à assinatura. Para os participantes, conteúdos exclusivos, investigativos, especializados ou de proximidade aumentam a disposição declarada de pagar por notícias.*

Palavras-chave: grupo focal; paywall; jornalismo digital; modelo de negócios.

Introduction

The evolution of journalism, from the origin of Gutenberg's press to the widespread distribution of information on the Internet, has been marked by a series of challenges and adaptations that have affected all areas of society. The popularization of the Internet in the 1990s, in particular, disrupted the traditional press model, which depended on advertising revenue and the sale of printed copies (COSTA, 2014). The free availability of online information, initially seen as a path to democratizing access, proved to be a dilemma for the financial sustainability of news organizations. On the one hand, paywalls—the mechanism that prevents readers from continuing to read the article, allowing continued access only upon payment via subscription—are important for the financial sustainability of legacy and digital-native outlets because they incentivize readers to subscribe. On the other hand, they can drive away those who encounter the paywall and lead them to alternative news sources that are not always reliable or even restrict access to information.

The transition from analog to digital was not only limited to the way news is transmitted and consumed, but also impacted the way revenue is generated, with print-based revenue giving way to online subscriptions. The first contemporary implementations of paywalls by news outlets date back to the 1990s, when *The Wall Street Journal* began charging for access to digital content in 1996, becoming a pioneering example of the model (WANG, 2016). In Brazil, one of the pioneering initiatives was undertaken by *Folha de S.Paulo*, which throughout the 2000s developed restricted access systems and, in 2012, consolidated the paywall, following the international trend (GOMES JÚNIOR, 2013). The impact of this movement was so significant that *The Economist* declared 2010 "the year of the paywall" (THE YEAR OF THE PAYWALL, 2010) in reference to the global acceleration of charging for access to digital news.

The relevance of the paywall, however, goes beyond the technical dimension of a simple charging mechanism and has become a central element of journalistic business models. Major media brands have

increasingly come to depend on revenue from digital subscriptions, as shown by the case of *The New York Times*, which surpassed 13.1 million subscribers, most of them digital, in 2026 (THE NEW YORK TIMES, 2026), with subscription revenue surpassing advertising revenue as the main source of revenue.

Although it is an important tool for the profitability of digital newspapers, especially in recurring-revenue models, its effectiveness in Brazil raises questions, given a population with low purchasing power, the well-established culture of free digital consumption on the Internet, and various other aspects. Thus, in this article, which results from broader research, we aim to analyze young Brazilians' perceptions of the paywall and news consumption, in a context of transformations in digital journalism business models. By shifting the focus to the experience of young readers—a group deeply embedded in a digital culture marked by the abundance of free content and by the mediation of platforms—we intend to offer evidence on the reception of the paywall in Brazil, bringing together discussions on business models, digital culture, and access to information. In addition, we pave the way for reflection on the need to reformulate journalism's value propositions, in order to reconcile economic sustainability and democratization of access to information.

Paywall and the willingness to pay for news

The paywall is understood as a means of increasing monetization by creating demand for exclusive content. Moreover, authors of studies in the field of Management, for example, also understand paywalls as a recurring subscription mechanism, a sales model commonly associated with innovative business environments, particularly in business models such as those used by startups (PANTALEÃO, 2015). Upon encountering the paywall, the reader is prompted to register or purchase a subscription to continue accessing the content of a digital newspaper, generally after reaching a predetermined limit of article views.

Moraes and Almeida (2021) analyze the contribution of online content monetization to the reinforcement of the social positions of journalistic brands, since in the globalized capitalist economic system information has become an important currency of exchange in the construction of power relations. Paywalls constitute one of the main mechanisms in a business model based on digital subscriptions and, despite their popularity in discussions of digital innovation and brand value, they have been characterized as a retro-innovation, representing a contemporary adaptation of practices previously employed in print journalism, but making use of a combination of strategies based on advertising and direct-to-consumer sales (LEBERECHT, 2013).

The crucial issue when applying this understanding to the journalism industry is that the subjective value of quality information exists within a digital environment characterized by widespread free access. Over the last decade, studies—such as the Digital News Report—have demonstrated the stagnation in willingness to pay for news. Despite minor fluctuations, the average across the 48 markets covered by the survey shows that, from 2016 to 2026, willingness to pay for online news rose from 12 to 17%. In Brazil, in the same period, there was a decline: from 22% in 2016 to 15% in 2026 (EGAN *et al.*, 2026). When broken down by age, the survey shows a clear pattern of stagnation, with only 15% of young Brazilians (18–24 years old) willing to pay for news in the last 10 years (there was a small increase in 2020, which was not sustained).

In 2014, Goyanes identified that younger people were more likely to pay for online news than older people. However, in general, respondents showed greater interest in paying for digital products whose main value proposition was to offer entertainment (music) and solutions (software and applications), but were less likely to pay for those that offer knowledge such as online newspapers (GOYANES, 2014). Three years later, Fletcher and Nielsen (2017) also observed this same trend, adding that young people are more accustomed to paying for other online services. However, over the years, studies, such as that by Peters *et al.* (2022), have provided a more nuanced understanding of this issue, showing that,

despite having grown up in digital environments, young people tend to be less willing to pay for journalism. Factors—such as the economic context of each country and the emergence of social media and mobile devices—may have made young people's news consumption more complex and increasingly incidental and fragmented (BOCZKOWSKI; MITCHELSTEIN; MATASSI, 2018). In Chart 1, we summarize this ecosystem around payment for news.

Chart 1 – Conceptual factors associated with the paywall.

Central element	Description
Challenge	Monetizing digital news in an environment marked by free access
Strategy	Use of the paywall as a mechanism for subscriptions and value capture
Challenge	Convincing the reader that journalistic information is worth the payment
Critical variable	Willingness to pay for online news
Audience of concern	Young people, especially because of instability in their willingness to pay
Expected result	Financial sustainability of the news outlet

Different types of paywall for different strategies

The paywall is understood as a kind of digital gate used to monetize content, totally or partially restricting users' access until payment is made. Paywalls are common on websites or content consumption platforms as well as in streaming applications, games, and other services. Beginning in the mid-2010s, newspapers began implementing paywalls on their websites as a way to increase revenues, after years of decline in print readership and advertising revenues due to factors such as the use of ad blockers (REIS, 2019).

In digital journalism, paywalls take various forms: the hard paywall completely blocks access to content for non-subscribers; the metered paywall allows users to read a limited number of articles before requiring a subscription; freemium leaves part of the content freely accessible while reserving reports and analyses considered premium for paying readers; and the dynamic paywall uses user behavior data—such as access

frequency, traffic source, and engagement—to personalize when and how the subscription prompt is displayed, seeking to maximize conversion without compromising audience reach (GOYANES, 2013).

The presence of a paywall does not, however, imply that the adopted strategies are uniform. *Folha de S.Paulo*, a pioneer in adopting the paywall in Brazil, varies the paywall restriction according to users' browsing habits (dynamic paywall). At the same time, access to some parts of the site is not counted in the paywall (freemium) such as the reader panel and the homepages. Conversely, there are also areas exclusive to subscribers such as columns and blogs (MARQUES, 2022). Thus, the decision to charge, especially via paywall, signals not only a belief in editorial quality, but also an audience segmentation based on purchasing power. Information is thus tailored to specific audiences and accessed primarily by those who can afford it.

Another trend observed when browsing Brazilian news sites is the integration of subscription systems with platform companies, such as Google and Meta, allowing users to log in through social media or integrated accounts. *Folha de S.Paulo*, for example, expands these options by also offering login via Apple (Figure 1).

These integrations demonstrate a functional alliance with Big Tech companies, in which users' browsing data and preferences feed algorithms that personalize the consumption experience, consistent with the data practices and algorithmic mediation of platform companies. By adopting these strategies—charging for content, logging in through Big Tech platforms, and editorial differentiation—news outlets not only reformulate their business models, but also reposition themselves within a broader logic of informational governance, in which data become economic assets and news access systems become part of an information regulation infrastructure.

Between walls and value: the perception of eight young readers

In this study, we aimed to analyze young people's perceptions of news consumption on news portals using paywalls in digital journalism.

Figure 1 – Screenshot of the *Folha de S.Paulo* website, highlighting login options integrated with Google, Meta, UOL, and Apple.



To this end, a focus group was conducted virtually, via video call, on March 22, 2025, with eight participants aged between 20 and 26 years. Given the challenges surrounding the financial sustainability of journalistic organizations, using young readers as the analytical corpus reflects the pressing need to develop new paying audiences. The methodological strategy was designed to explore young people's behavior when accessing news with paywalls, determine the degree of familiarity with the logic of paywalls, and explore perceptions about the monetization of digital journalistic content based on the participants' own analyses and impressions.

Focus groups are effective for capturing subjective and collective perceptions in an environment of structured exchange, allowing observation not only of what participants think, but also of how they develop their opinions in dialogue with peers. Regarding the number of participants, Bloor *et al.* (2001) consider that groups with fewer than six participants

may generate limited interaction, while in groups of 12 or 15 participants, not everyone can express themselves in the available time. Based on this understanding, Assis (2017), when exploring the dynamics of user participation in participatory journalism environments, also conducted a focus group with eight participants. Thus, we considered this an appropriate number for the purposes of this research.

The study design was based on the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ), a set of 32 items developed by Tong, Sainsbury, and Craig (2007) to ensure transparency and rigor in the conduct and reporting of qualitative studies, especially those based on interviews and focus groups. To ensure consistency in moderating and guiding the discussion, a semi-structured guide was used (a previously prepared but flexible question guide that structures the conversation without constraining it), allowing participants to freely develop their answers.

Participant recruitment was carried out by an online form shared via email with personal contacts and on social media, such as Instagram and WhatsApp, in which interested individuals could apply by providing contact information, time preferences, degree of familiarity with news platforms, and whether or not they were subscribers to a news website. Volunteers who met the criteria were contacted individually via WhatsApp, initially via chat and subsequently via a temporary video message, in which the researcher presented the research objectives and the logistical details of the meeting. After many attempts, the eight selected candidates were unable to reach a consensus regarding availability for an in-person session. Thus, we opted to conduct the focus group via video call, to ensure the feasibility of the study.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Pharmacy of Universidade Federal da Bahia — CEP/FFAR/UFBA, under protocol 82209224.5.0000.8035, and in accordance with Resolutions No. 466/2012 and No. 510/2016 of the Brazilian National Health Council, safeguarding the physical and psychological well-being, dignity, and rights of the participants. Before conducting the focus group, participants received and signed an Informed Consent Form, which

ensured the confidentiality of their identities and made explicit the ethical safeguards throughout the research.

The session lasted 110 minutes (approximately two hours) and was moderated by the lead researcher and her advisor, ensuring balanced participation and ethical conduct throughout the discussion. The session was audio- and video-recorded, aiming to capture both spoken content and facial expressions, gestures, and other nonverbal signals relevant to qualitative analysis. Full transcription was done using the TurboScribe software.

At the beginning of the session, each participant (Chart 2) was identified with a number (from 1 to 8), in order to facilitate transcription and ensure balanced participation in the recorded discussion. Each of the ten scripted questions was answered by each participant following their assigned numerical order. Despite this order, participants could also make additional comments after everyone had had an opportunity to respond during the first round to that same question. The questions were formulated to stimulate participation, but also to allow free association of ideas and the emergence of spontaneous narratives. Moderation followed the ethical principles of a non-directive approach and receptiveness, in accordance with good practices recommended for the use of the technique in qualitative research (TONG; SAINSBURY; CRAIG, 2007).

Chart 2 – Participants' profile.

Number	Age	Sex	Undergraduate program	News sources through which they obtain information
1	24	Woman	Design	Instagram and YouTube
2	21	Man	Journalism	X and local portals
3	23	Woman	Architecture	Instagram
4	21	Man	Advertising	Google News
5	26	Woman	Social Sciences	Television and X
6	20	Woman	Physics	Instagram and print newspapers
7	22	Man	Communication	Regional and national portals
8	20	Man	Journalism	X and WhatsApp

The analysis that follows was structured based on the question script, which focused on ways of consuming news, willingness to pay, the feeling of having one's reading blocked by the paywall, and possible strategies to circumvent this block. Because it was a relatively small group—eight people—it was not necessary to use software for content analysis. The generative artificial intelligence tool Gemini was used only to formulate the map of words associated with the paywall. Nonverbal elements were recorded by one of the authors during the focus group session and incorporated into the analysis when necessary for interpreting the results.

Among the 32 COREQ criteria applied in conducting the focus group, we highlight, for example, the researchers' credentials; care in approaching participants; transparency regarding audiovisual recording for data collection; the presence of only researchers and participants; field notes made during the focus group; and identification of quotations by participant number.

Algorithms and passive consumption

Focus group participants consume news mostly through social media, which is in line with the trend indicated in studies such as the Digital News Report (EGAN *et al.*, 2026). Although they recognize the need for monetization as part of providing a service, they prefer free alternatives, with emphasis on social media. Instagram was widely cited and emerged as the main channel for accessing news for seven of the eight participants. As Participant 3 highlighted: "I don't look for news; it comes to me through the Instagram feed," thereby delegating agenda-setting and curation to the algorithm. X is cited for its speed, especially among journalism students (Participants 2 and 8), who follow the work of other journalists on the platform. YouTube is the third most cited channel, seen as a resource mainly for analytical content (e.g., interviews on the UOL channel). Although television does not involve paywalls, which are the focus of this research, it is cited as a news source and continues being relevant, especially in homes where there is a habit of watching morning news as a shared household activity (Participant 6).

Notably, of the five channels cited in the discussion (Instagram, X, WhatsApp, YouTube, and television), three rely on algorithmic mediation to determine the content delivered to users. Outlets—such as *G1*, *Correio*, *Folha de S.Paulo*, and *CNN*—were prominently cited, but most participants emphasize that news reaches them organically, via algorithms or shares.

The participants' accounts show that algorithm-mediated news agenda-setting has already become normalized among the participants. What is recommended or delivered by platforms does not seem to be a cause of discomfort, even in the face of content bubbles or potential risks of disinformation. Thus, the adoption of social media as the main source not only shows an adaptation to formats, but also reinforces a logic in which free and indirect access to news becomes an essential criterion for consumption among participants, which represents a challenge for monetization models based on the paywall.

Practical refusal and the limits of willingness to pay

By stating that "quality journalism has costs," Participant 7 triggered a discussion in which there was a consensus that the company needs the means to pay its employees. However, the same participants who emphasized the importance of monetization through subscriptions also reported rarely subscribing to outlets. Only three participants (1, 4, and 7) considered it fair to pay for news. The group's prevailing view supports the idea that paying for news is a fair practice in exchange for the service, but there are also statements indicating that these same participants do not see themselves as potential subscribers: "If the article is blocked, I look for a summary on Twitter," said Participant 3. Participants 1 and 4 mentioned that consumption of paid news is not a financial priority, while Participant 8 highlighted the abundance of free sources as a disincentive. There is a disconnect between the participants' self-image and their role as consumers because, in a certain way, the young participants in the research do not see themselves as part of the target audience of traditional

brands, even while recognizing the importance of paying. Reluctance to pay reinforces the results of Kormelink (2023), which point out that the fundamental factor in the decision whether to pay for a news subscription is cost. The tension between the sustainability of outlets and democratic access is evident in the focus group's responses.

The assessment that digital newspapers transferred their print-era business model to the digital environment (COSTA, 2014) without major leaps of innovation or digital-native thinking is a view that participants expressed more than once when questioned about subscription: "It has always been like this with magazines and print newspapers; digital just followed the model" (Participant 5) and "it has always been part of our lives. The only difference is that now it is digital" (Participant 1). The conclusion of the discussion is that payment for the journalistic service is appropriate, even fair; however, they naturally point to other means of news consumption that do not pass through the paywall or involve considering a subscription such as social media and even news aggregator apps (Google News).

The desire for higher-quality information is evident and is reflected in the various strategies used by each participant to access news without being blocked by the paywall. For example, Participant 4 exemplifies that "The Google News feed shows the basic information without asking for registration or requiring you to click on the article," showing the possibility of being satisfied with only the headline and the lead.

Participants 1, 4, and 7 demonstrated an understanding of the economic logic behind paywalls. This position resonated with the group, which established a clear criterion to justify payments: only exclusive or specialized content, such as in-depth journalistic investigations, would be considered worthy of being placed behind a paywall. As Participant 5 highlighted, general news available in multiple outlets was categorically classified as "not worthy of a paywall," evidencing an implicit hierarchy of informational value. However, this apparent acceptance did not translate into practical adoption. Resistance to traditional outlets was predominant, with six of the eight participants actively seeking free alternatives.

Participants 2, 3, and 6 systematically reported avoiding paywalls by using platforms, such as social media and Google News, while Participant 8 developed a selective strategy: "If the news is relevant, I look for it elsewhere or wait for it to appear in an outlet without a paywall." This predominant stance was not absolute, however, and there were some exceptions. Participant 5 made her willingness to pay conditional on "exclusive investigations," while Participant 7 established local coverage as a criterion: "If it covered my neighborhood, I would subscribe."

The users' creativity in circumventing paywalls is illustrated in the alternative behaviors documented (Chart 3).

Chart 3 – Strategies for circumventing paywalls.

From the paywall to X (formerly Twitter)	Participant 3 developed the habit of looking for "summaries on Twitter" when confronted with paywalls.
From the paywall to other outlets	Some participants reported searching for similar headlines in other free outlets as a way to bypass the block on the original article.
From the paywall to search engines	The habit of copying the title of the blocked article and conducting a new Google search was cited, in an attempt to find the same report (or an equivalent version) on sites without a paywall.

There are also strategies to avoid the paywall (Chart 4). Participant 6 optimized her consumption through Google News, especially valuing the fact that "the Google feed shows the basic information without asking for registration." Others mentioned the use of social media and messaging apps (such as WhatsApp) as indirect paths of access: upon receiving links shared by contacts, they could view the information without necessarily facing the access barrier—a practice that is common, especially in work and family groups. This set of strategies is not perceived by participants as a form of transgression, but as a pragmatic response to the logic of information monetization, which does not always align with their expectations. Often, the logic of payment does not align with participants' economic circumstances, digital habits, or perceptions of the value of journalistic content.

A recurring sentiment in the participants' accounts is that access to information should be universal and free, as argued by authors such as

Lessig (2004), Stallman (2010), and Foletto (2021). The right to free access to information and culture is one of the pillars of the contemporary digital imaginary, which was consolidated through the Internet as a space for decentralized circulation of knowledge. Thus, the reported practices not only evidence an individual form of resistance to the paywall, but can be interpreted, in light of the literature on free culture, as an implicit embrace of the collective values of free access.

Chart 4 – Strategies for bypassing the paywall.

Strategy	Frequency	Quote example
Google News	5/8	"I use the Google feed to read the summary" (P4)
WhatsApp	3/8	"My uncle sends screenshots of the news" (P6)
X (summaries)	2/8	"I only read the tweet that shared the article" (P2)

The amount spent on a subscription, especially when there is no immediate clarity about the editorial or investigative value that justifies payment, is seen as an expense. This tension points to a recurrent strategic challenge in the field of digital journalism: making visible the value of paid content, especially in a scenario of informational abundance and audience fragmentation.

During the focus group, certain words were employed in various contexts. Because they express impressions, feelings, and opinions, it was relevant to highlight their recurrence throughout the discussions (Chart 5).

Chart 5 – Map of words associated with the paywall.

Associated word	Frequency (times)
"Fair"	15
"Frustrating"	12
"Necessary"	10
"Inaccessible"	8
"Value"	7

When analyzing the participants' statements, we verified that, although payment for digital news is not completely rejected, it still encounters

significant obstacles related to perceived value. The paywall model, when not accompanied by clear communication about what differentiates it from free content, tends to be perceived as more of a technical than an editorial barrier. Therefore, many of the participants adopt alternatives. The behaviors point to a central dimension of the relationship between these users and journalistic platforms: the notion of perceived value, in which the reader's engagement with paid content depends not only on the existence of a paywall, but on the outlet's ability to communicate why that content is worth paying for. This involves elements such as credibility, depth, exclusivity, and relevance—characteristics that, when recognized by the public, can transform the willingness to pay into a gesture of symbolic support for journalism.

In this context, hybrid paywall models—such as the metered paywall, which allows access to a limited number of free articles before the barrier is activated—can serve as tools for bringing readers closer to the outlet and allowing them to experience value gradually. These models offer the reader the opportunity to become acquainted with the content, establish familiarity with the outlet's editorial approach, and thus develop a bond with the journalistic brand. Beyond payment itself, as per the focus group data, adoption of paid information models depends on creating an experience of symbolic and utilitarian value, which implies rethinking loyalty strategies, personalization, and presence in digital channels.

Final Considerations

From the perspective of news consumers, in this article, we aimed to understand how the journalism business model based on paywalls, widely adopted in recent years, is perceived by eight young people aged 20 to 26 years in a context of digital culture marked by practices, such as the free circulation of information, as well as a broad offering of content and sources.

Considering the focus group results, there is a dissonance that already appears in the literature (KORMELINK, 2023): participants recognize the importance of professional journalism and value the work of those

who produce it, but hesitate to pay for it, especially when free alternatives are available. Participants used various strategies. These included copying the article title into Google, looking for summaries on X or WhatsApp, and receiving links in work or family groups. All of these strategies appeared as practical ways of circumventing the paywall. Interestingly, no one identified this behavior as inappropriate or wrong. For participants, it is something natural, part of information consumption today. This demonstrates a more structural problem of journalistic business models, which have not yet managed to transform perceived value into actual willingness to pay. It became clear that the paywall, by charging for access, creates distance between the outlet and younger audiences, thereby keeping them from the type of content that could be most valued. By limiting access, paywalls lead people to read only headlines, summaries, and what circulates on social media. This limits their exposure to more substantive and relevant journalism.

In this study, we showed that, although the participants understood the logic of monetization, this recognition did not translate into everyday practice, as online experiences offer easy and free alternatives. We suggest that the tension between free access and the need for monetization of information is not resolved only by installing technical barriers. On the contrary, digital walls expose the weaknesses of a model that replicates market practices from other sectors without considering cultural, behavioral, and economic contexts regarding news consumption.

Another aspect of news consumption to consider is informal sharing, which has normalized paywall circumvention among the study's respondents, whether by using tools that facilitate access or by avoiding the paywall altogether, choosing to consume news through channels other than those of large media brands.

Another relevant connection is Foletto's (2021) approach, which emphasizes the role of participatory cultures in the digital environment. What this exploratory study reveals is that the culture of circumventing the paywall is not reduced to an act of piracy, but indicates a communal logic of information circulation.

In the focus group, we also observed that the perceived value is higher for investigative or specialized content, or content considered scarce in the free information environment, consistent with the literature on the role of editorial differentiation in the sustainability of digital business models.

The study has a sampling limitation, as it focused on eight young people of similar ages living in the same urban area, not reflecting the socioeconomic and cultural diversity of the Brazilian public. Likewise, the study does not consider the impacts of emerging trends such as the rise of micro-influencers or new artificial intelligence platforms that already affect the news production and distribution cycle. At the same time, these limitations pave the way for future research.

In conclusion, the idea of "bypassing the wall" that inspires the title of this article should not be read as a violation. It is a sign of a failure to listen and, paradoxically, an opportunity to rebuild connections. As long as walls are erected solely to restrict access and ensure financial compensation, there will always be those who find ways to circumvent them. For journalism to remain alive, relevant, and sustainable, it must therefore build more bridges with young people to withstand the passage of time and the fleeting nature of social media.

Conflict of interests: nothing to declare.

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Research data availability: In accordance with the guidance of the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Pharmacy of Universidade Federal da Bahia – CEP/FFAR/UFBA, the recording and transcription of the focus group were stored in digital files, accessible only to the lead researcher and her advisor. At the end of the research, all material will be kept on file for at least five years, in accordance with Resolution No. 466/12.

Authors' contributions: Souza, A.P.C.: conceptualization, data curation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, validation, writing — original draft, writing — review and editing. Vieira, L.S.: supervision, writing — original draft, writing — review and editing.

Use of artificial intelligence: As stated in the methodological description, the TurboScribe software was used to transcribe the focus group content. For the formulation of the word map associated with the paywall, the generative artificial intelligence tool Gemini was used.

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About the authors

Andrezza Pessoa Carvalho de Souza: journalist with a master's degree in Communication and Contemporary Culture from Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA). Email: andrezzapessoacarvalho@gmail.com

Lívia de Souza Vieira: professor at the School of Communication and the Graduate Program in Communication and Contemporary Culture at Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA). She holds a PhD and a master's degree in Journalism from Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), with a doctoral research stay at Birmingham City University (England). Email: liviasvieira@gmail.com

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