Subscription Economy

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What subscription adds the most value to your life?
2. Have you ever forgotten about a subscription you were paying for?
3. Do you think subscriptions save us money or make us spend more?

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.
Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on pages 2–3.

_____	1.	utopian
_____	2.	burden
_____	3.	recurring
_____	4.	predictable
_____	5.	perpetual
_____	6.	generic
_____	7.	sustain
_____	8.	monetization
_____	9.	patron
_____	10.	far-fetched

a) lasting forever or never ending

b) something that is expected or easy to guess in advance

c) the process of converting something into money or a source of revenue

d) to keep alive

e) something that is difficult to carry or deal with

f) a supporter or sponsor

g) happening repeatedly or coming back at regular intervals

h) not likely to happen

i) lacking specific or unique features; not special or distinctive

j) describing an ideal or perfect place, especially one that is unrealistic or impractical

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Reading

SUBSCRIPTION ECONOMY
Access or ownership?

1. In 2016, Danish politician Ida Auken sparked controversy with her article titled "Welcome to 2030. I own nothing, have no privacy, and life has never been better." Auken envisions a **utopian** society where all products—from cars to kitchen appliances—have become shareable services, freeing people from the **burden** of ownership. Although Auken later clarified that her article was more a thought experiment than a serious proposal, the idea of turning products into services has become a reality; the subscription economy is taking over.
2. When we hear "subscription," most of us think of streaming services. But subscriptions are popping up in almost every area of our lives. Companies now sell software as a service (SaaS) for a monthly fee instead of a one-time installation price. Weekly meal kits offer a convenient alternative to grocery shopping, and pet store memberships bring a steady supply of dog food to our doorsteps. Many are surprised to discover that the full features of machines like printers, treadmills, and medical devices are now locked behind a **recurring** fee. In the confusion of multiple monthly payments, some apps even offer to find and cancel subscriptions we've lost track of—for a subscription fee, of course!
3. Subscription-based business models can bring benefits to companies and customers alike. For sellers and service providers, subscribers equal **predictable** revenue that can be invested into market research and product development. Customers benefit from this development, enjoying cutting-edge features and fresh content—often at an affordable price point. In education, for example, subscription platforms trade in outdated textbooks for a dynamic library of current topics and the latest learning tools. In a world that values flexibility, instant access, and continuous improvement, subscriptions are quickly becoming the new normal.

"Ownership is dead. Access is the new imperative."

—Tien Tzuo, tech entrepreneur

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Reading cont.

4. But not everyone is excited about exchanging ownership for **perpetual** payment plans. In the US, the average consumer wastes hundreds of dollars each year on unused memberships. Companies know that many subscribers forget (or can't figure out how) to cancel a plan before it auto-renews. Privacy concerns also arise as companies collect increasing amounts of data in order to offer more personalized experiences and retain subscribers. Yet for all the promised customization, some subscription services still feel **generic**. When viewers worldwide watch the same mainstream shows on popular streaming platforms, what space is left for local voices, niche creators, or culturally specific content?

5. Some subscription models, however, are designed to **sustain** local economies and independent creators. Community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs connect residents with nearby farmers, delivering fresh, seasonal produce boxes in exchange for a subscription fee that keeps family farms running. **Monetization** platforms let fans become modern-day **patrons** of the arts, supporting the work of their favorite musicians and writers. Wine-of-the-month clubs and handmade candle boxes give small businesses a way to build customer relationships while introducing subscribers to quality local treasures. Subscriptions can be personal and community-focused—far from the one-size-fits-all approach pushed by global brands.

6. The subscription economy is unlikely to disappear anytime soon even if Auken's utopia seems **far-fetched**. Nevertheless, it's worth asking: will transforming products into services really bring us greater happiness, or will we decide that some things are still worth owning?

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Comprehension

Choose the best answer for each question.

1. What is the main focus of this article?

   a) explaining why consumers are frustrated with subscriptions
   b) comparing different types of subscription models
   c) exploring how subscription services impact both businesses and consumers
   d) encouraging consumers to cancel their unused subscriptions

2. What is one way consumers benefit from subscription services?

   a) They are guaranteed lifetime access to services they subscribe to.
   b) They gain predictable revenue and can invest in product development.
   c) They own the products they use instead of borrowing them.
   d) They can access the latest technology and content without large upfront costs.

3. What does the term “taking over” mean in paragraph 1?

   a) becoming more popular
   b) taking control
   c) starting to disappear
   d) creating opportunities

4. What concern does the article raise about subscription-based entertainment services?

   a) They are more expensive than traditional media.
   b) They encourage generic content that lacks diversity.
   c) They reduce the amount of content available to viewers.
   d) They make it harder for customers to find free content.

5. How does the article contrast global subscription models with community-focused ones?

   a) Global models are more affordable than local models.
   b) Global models allow for more personalization than local models.
   c) Local models are more likely to support independent creators and small businesses.
   d) Local models require more subscriptions than global models.

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Vocabulary Review

A. Choose the Correct Word

Choose the word or phrase with the closest meaning to the underlined word or phrase in the following sentences.

1. Many consumers are frustrated by <u>recurring</u> payments for services they rarely use.

   a) refundable
   b) restricted
   c) repeated

2. Many online creators depend on <u>monetization</u> to earn a living from their content.

   a) charging money
   b) buying ads
   c) overspending

3. Subscription services provide companies with a <u>predictable</u> source of income.

   a) increasing
   b) reliable
   c) unstable

4. Subscription-based funding helps <u>sustain</u> small businesses by providing steady revenue.

   a) create
   b) optimize
   c) support

5. Some people see ownership as a privilege, while others view it as a <u>burden</u>.

   a) responsibility
   b) luxury
   c) opportunity

B. Synonyms or Antonyms

Are the following words synonyms or antonyms?

1. utopian / idealistic _____
2. perpetual / endless _____
3. generic / unique _____
4. far-fetched / realistic _____
5. patron / seller _____

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Grammar Review

PHRASAL VERBS

A. Reference

Phrasal Verb Form

verb + particle (+ particle)

Phrasal verbs are verbs that have one or two particles.
The particles can be prepositions or adverbs.

Phrasal Verb	Meaning
end up	to finally be in a certain situation
figure out	to find a solution
get out	to leave something
keep on	to continue doing something
sign up	to agree to join something
take over	to take control or to replace something

B. Practice

Complete the sentences using a phrasal verb from the list in Part A.
You may need to change the verb tense.

1. Many people _____ for free trials and forget to cancel before they get charged.
2. Streaming services have _____ traditional cable TV, changing how we watch movies and shows.
3. Some companies make it nearly impossible to _____ of a subscription because they hide the cancellation option.
4. If you don't pay for a premium plan, you'll just have to _____ watching more and more ads.
5. After spending almost an hour chatting with customer service, I finally _____ how to cancel my membership plan.
6. It seemed like a great deal at first, but then I _____ paying for six different streaming platforms!

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Discussion

1. Why do you think people are willing to pay for subscriptions rather than make one-time purchases?
2. What are some advantages of owning a product rather than subscribing to it? Are there any products or services that you would never want to rent or subscribe to?
3. Many people forget to cancel unused subscriptions. Do you think companies intentionally make it difficult to unsubscribe? Should there be laws against this?
4. Do you think the trend of turning products into services will continue? What industries do you think will be the next to adopt subscription models?
5. Politician Ida Auken imagines a world where people own nothing and simply use services as needed. How would you feel living in a society like this?

Critical Thinking

IN PAIRS OR SMALL GROUPS

Politician Ida Auken envisions a society where all products are shared and nothing is owned, including kitchen appliances and clothes. Choose a product that isn't typically purchased as a subscription today. With your partner or group, think of some ways this product could be turned into a subscription service. Present your ideas to your classmates. Try to convince them to subscribe to your service rather than buy the product.

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Listening

A. Gap Fill

Fill in the blanks as you listen to the recording.

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Listening cont.

A. Gap Fill cont.

4. But not everyone is excited about exchanging ownership for _____ payment plans. In the US, the average consumer wastes hundreds of dollars each year on unused memberships. Companies know that many subscribers forget (or can't figure out how) to cancel a plan before it auto-renews. Privacy concerns also arise as companies collect increasing amounts of data in order to offer more personalized experiences and retain subscribers. Yet for all the promised customization, some subscription services still feel _____ . When viewers worldwide watch the same mainstream shows on popular streaming platforms, what space is left for local voices, niche creators, or culturally specific content?

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6. The subscription economy is unlikely to disappear anytime soon even if Auken's utopia seems _____ . Nevertheless, it's worth asking: will transforming products into services really bring us greater happiness, or will we decide that some things are still worth owning?

B. Extra Practice

Find all the phrasal verbs in the reading.
Try to guess their meaning.

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Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students read about the rise of the subscription economy and the benefits and drawbacks to both businesses and consumers. Students practice using phrasal verbs and discuss the impact of subscription models on local and global communities.

LEVEL: Adv

TIME: 1.5–2 hours

TAGS: discussion, subscription, subscribe, economy, membership, fee, phrasal verbs

Pre-Reading

A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

Have students work in small groups or as a class.

B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

1. j
2. e
3. g
4. b
5. a
6. i
7. d
8. c
9. f
10. h

Reading (and/or Listening)

Read individually, in small groups, or as a class. Discuss the quote. You can also play the listening as your students read along. A gap-fill version of the reading is available on pages 8–9. Help your students with vocabulary and expressions that they are unfamiliar with.

Comprehension

1. c
2. d
3. a
4. b
5. c

Vocabulary Review

A. CHOOSE THE CORRECT WORD

1. c
2. a
3. b
4. c
5. a

B. SYNONYMS OR ANTONYMS

1. synonyms
2. synonyms
3. antonyms
4. antonyms
5. antonyms

Grammar Review

B. PRACTICE

1. sign up
2. taken over
3. get out
4. keep on
5. figured out
6. ended up

Discussion

Answers will vary.
Can be done as a class or in small groups or pairs.

Critical Thinking

Answers will vary.
Can be done in small groups or pairs.

(continued on the next page...)

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Answer Key cont.

Listening

A. GAP FILL

1. utopian, burden
2. recurring
3. predictable
4. perpetual, generic
5. sustain, Monetization, patrons
6. far-fetched

B. EXTRA PRACTICE

1. take over
2. pop up
3. trade in
4. figure out

SPELLING NOTE:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the word *Favorite*. Most other English-speaking countries spell it this way: *Favourite*. Make it a challenge for your students to find this word in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spelling.

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