NEWS & MEDIA RESEARCH CENTRE

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

# DIGITAL NEWS REPORT: AUSTRALIA 2021

**News & Media Research Centre**
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The *Digital News Report: Australia 2021* can be downloaded from the News & Media Research Centre's website:

**http://www.canberra.edu.au/research/faculty-research-centres/nmrc/digital-news-report-australia-2021**

# DIGITAL NEWS REPORT: AUSTRALIA 2021

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# METHODOLOGY

This report is part of a long running international survey coordinated by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, an international research centre in the comparative study of journalism based at the University of Oxford. The *Digital News Report* delivers comparative data on media usage in 46 countries and across 6 continents.

The News and Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra is the Australian partner institute and author of the *Digital News Report: Australia*. This is the seventh annual *DNR: Australia* report.

Six new countries were added this year. Fieldwork was conducted between mid-January and the end of February 2021 by YouGov plc. The questionnaire and the overall project methodology were consistent across all territories. Online samples were of around 2000 in each country and were designed to be nationally representative with quotas for age, gender, region, and education. Core questions were asked in all 46 countries in order to provide an international comparison. However, in some countries this was not possible. The education quota was not applied to South Africa, Malaysia, Mexico, and Philippines. In India, Nigeria and Kenya only English-speaking respondents were recruited, with a 55 year age limit.

## AUSTRALIAN SAMPLE

The survey was conducted by YouGov using an online questionnaire in January and February 2021. The sample is drawn from an online panel of 77, 390 adult Australians. The final sample is reflective of the population that has access to the internet. This year, we did not exclude those who said they access news less than once a month. This group was excluded from the survey in previous years. Those who access news less than once a month comprised 6% of the sample. Whenever possible, we compared the results and noted any impact of the inclusion of this group. The data were weighted to targets based on age, gender, region and education level to represent the total population based on Australian Bureau of Statistics census data.

| AUSTRALIAN SAMPLE | |
|---|---|
| Panel Size | 77,390 |
| Total number of extremely low and non-users in the sample (unweighted) | 128 |
| **Final Sample Size** | **2,034** |

As this is an online survey, the results will underrepresent the consumption habits of people who are not online (typically older, less affluent, regional residents, and those with limited formal education). The survey was conducted in English and does not represent the linguistic diversity of Australia.

Note: Due to rounding, numbers in columns and bars throughout this document may not add precisely to totals or 100%.

## 2021 PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

| | |
|---|---|
| Argentina | ARG |
| Australia | AUS |
| Austria | AUT |
| Belgium | BEL |
| Brazil | BRA |
| Bulgaria | BUL |
| Canada | CAN |
| Chile | CHL |
| Colombia* | COL |
| Croatia | CRO |
| Czech | CZE |
| Denmark | DEN |
| Finland | FIN |
| France | FRA |
| Germany | GER |
| Greece | GRE |
| HK | HK |
| Hungary | HUN |
| India* | IND |
| Indonesia* | INA |
| Ireland | IRE |
| Italy | ITA |
| Japan | JPN |
| Kenya | KEN |
| Korea, South | KOR |
| Malaysia | MYS |
| Mexico | MEX |
| Netherlands | NLD |
| Nigeria* | NGR |
| Norway | NOR |
| Peru* | PER |
| Philippines | PHL |
| Poland | POL |
| Portugal | POR |
| Romania | ROU |
| Singapore | SGN |
| Slovakia | SVK |
| South Africa | RSA |
| Spain | SPA |
| Sweden | SWE |
| Switzerland | SUI |
| Taiwan | TWN |
| Thailand* | THA |
| Turkey | TUR |
| UK | UK |
| USA | USA |

*New in 2021

## EDUCATION QUOTA

The education question reflects the categories in the UN's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). In the past, the lower educated population was underrepresented. The categories we used in the Australian survey are summarised in the following table.

| WHAT IS YOUR HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION? IF YOU ARE CURRENTLY IN FULL-TIME EDUCATION PLEASE PUT YOUR HIGHEST QUALIFICATION TO DATE. | LEVEL |
|---|---|
| • I did not complete any formal education<br>• Early childhood education<br>• Primary education<br>• Lower secondary education (High School, Yr 10) | Low |
| • Upper secondary education (Yr 12, HSC, Baccalaureate or other Senior Secondary Certificate of Education)<br>• Post-secondary, non-tertiary education (generally vocational/ professional qualification of 1–2 years, e.g. VET (Vocational Education and Training) Certificates I–IV) | Medium |
| • Bachelors or equivalent level degree<br>• Masters or equivalent level degree<br>• Doctoral or equivalent level degree | High |

## GENERATIONS

News consumption is closely tied to age. To improve our understanding of changing consumption habits over the life span, we use a generational approach to our analysis. This provides more meaningful analysis than evenly spaced age groups. For the purposes of reliable international analysis, we have adopted the generational categories used by the PEW Research[1]. In this year's sample the maximum age of the respondents was 90. Instead of using PEW's Greatest and Silent Generation categories, we merged the two and used '75+'. The age span calculation is based on the respondent's age as of December 2020. This is because the fieldwork was conducted in early 2021 and most people would not have reached their birthdays at the time of the survey.

| BIRTH YEARS | GENERATION | ABBREVIATION USED | AGE SPAN |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1901–27 | Greatest Generation | 75+ | 93+ |
| 1928–45 | Silent Generation | | 75–92 |
| 1946 –64 | Baby Boomers | BB | 56–74 |
| 1965–80 | Gen X | X | 40–55 |
| 1981–96 | Gen Y, Millennials | Y | 24–39 |
| 1997– | Gen Z, Post-millennials | Z | 18–23 |

## REGION

While the data is weighted according the population size of each State and Territory, the data has also been analysed by postcode. This is important because it allows our report to reflect the geographic diversity of Australia and the differences in news consumption between urban and rural populations. The Australian Bureau of Statistics geographic classifications are used to analyse the data based on the groupings of major cities, inner region, outer region, remote, and very remote. However, because of the small number of participants from remote and very remote areas, we combined news consumers outside of major cities as 'regional'.

*Core sponsors of the international survey include Google News Initiative, BBC News, Ofcom, Edelman UK, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), the Media Industry Research Foundation of Finland, the Fritt Ord Foundation in Norway, the Dutch Media Authority (CvdM), the Korea Press Foundation, the Leibniz Institute for Media Research/Hans Bredow Institute, Hamburg University, the University of Navarra,* ***the University of Canberra****, Le Centre d'études sur les médias, Université Laval in Canada, Roskilde University in Denmark, and The Open Society Foundations.*

[1] https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/

# AUTHORS


**Sora Park** is the Associate Dean of Research for the Faculty of Arts and Design and Professor of Communication at the University of Canberra. Her research focuses on digital media users, media markets and media policy. She is the Leader of the *Digital News Report: Australia* project.

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# CONTRIBUTORS

**Simon Crerar** is co-founder of *PS Media, a local news startup. He spent the first 10 years of his journalism career working for *The Times* in London. Simon was most recently founding editor and then GM of BuzzFeed Australia. In 2020 he worked with five regional publishers on a digital audience, engagement and revenue growth project funded by Google News Initiative.

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**Anna Draffin** is the Chief Executive Office of the Public Interest Journalism Initiative, an independent think tank researching a future for public interest journalism in Australia. She has held senior executive and board roles across government, business, and philanthropy and brings her leadership experience of developing and implementing social impact and business strategy for complex civic issues, to news media. She is a Professional Associate at the Faculty of Arts & Design, University of Canberra.

**Clare Armstrong** is the National Political Reporter at *The Daily Telegraph* based in Canberra parliamentary press gallery. She was previously a reporter for *The Townsville Bulletin* and *The Courier Mail*, and has been recognised with awards for her work covering indigenous affairs, rural issues and federal politics.

**Nic Newman** is Senior Research Associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and is lead author of the annual Digital News Report. He also authors an influential annual report on media and technology trends. Nic has a background as a journalist and was a founding member of the BBC News website. Later, as Head of Product Development for BBC News, he helped introduce innovations such as blogs, podcasting, and mobile apps.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for credible and fast news. In the early days, news consumption increased as the public tried to make sense of the rapidly evolving crisis[1]. Despite the surge in demand, news organisations experienced a substantial hit to revenues, which led to the closure or suspension of many local newspapers across Australia[2]. The pandemic has accelerated the industry's decades-long struggle to replace falling advertising income.

The global data show there is no consistent pattern in COVID-19's impact on news consumers. In Australia, 57% say their lives have been impacted by the pandemic, the lowest out of the 46 countries surveyed.

However, this year's report reveals the rapid increase in news consumption by Australians at the start of the pandemic has not been maintained. The proportion of people paying for it has not increased, and interest in news has declined since 2020.

We also find Australians have become more trusting of news in general but concern about misinformation remains high. However, many Australians lack adequate levels of media literacy to identify it and are unaware of the financial difficulty facing the news industry.

[1] Park, S., Fisher, C., Lee, J. & McGuinness, K. (2020). *COVID-19: Australian news and misinformation.* Canberra: News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra. https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-07/apo-nid306728.pdf
[2] Public Interest Journalism Initiative (2021). Newsroom changes January 2019—March 2021. The Australian Newsroom Mapping Project. https://anmp.piji.com.au/

## TRUST IS UP BUT THE COVID-19 'TRUST BUMP' HAS NOT BEEN MAINTAINED

**Trust in news increased globally over the past 12 months. In Australia, trust in news has risen (+5) to 43%, close to the global average (44%).** The improvement in trust likely reflects the public's greater reliance on news in a crisis, and the active dissemination of official health advice by news outlets during the pandemic. In contrast, trust in news found on social media or search engines did not increase.

In the past year, people have increasingly turned to public broadcasters for news, and trust in traditional news brands remains high. However, the peak in trust associated with news reporting about COVID-19 at the start of the pandemic[3] (53%) has not been sustained.

## COVID-19 NEWS CONSUMPTION LEVELS HAVE FALLEN

During the early months of COVID-19[4], 70% of Australians accessed news more than once a day. In 2021 the proportion of heavy news consumers fell to 51%, which is 4 percentage points lower than pre-COVID.

**Australians' interest in news dropped during the pandemic in line with other countries. Interest in the news has been consistently declining among Australian audiences.** In 2016, 64% were either 'very' or 'extremely' interested in news. In 2021, this has fallen to 52% (-12).

We see a clear downward trend in the use of traditional news media. Print has halved since 2016. Most Australians (80%) say they have not read a newspaper or magazine in the past week. Only 4% say they primarily get news from print publications. Access to a regional or local newspaper has declined from 19% to 11% in the same period.

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of Australians mainly watching TV for news surged[5] (51%). This year, the proportion of people using TV as their main source of news dropped back to the pre-COVID levels (40%), but it remains the most popular source of news for Australians.

## CONCERN ABOUT MISINFORMATION REMAINS HIGH BUT EXPERIENCE IS LOWER

In 2021, **general concern about false and misleading information online in Australia is high (64%), and much higher than the global average (56%).** A large number (59%) of Australians also say they encountered misinformation in the last week. Across a range of topics, experience of misinformation about COVID-19 was the highest (38%) followed by politics (33%) and climate change (29%). Nearly a quarter of participants did not know if they had come across misinformation (23%). **This figure is higher among those with low education (30%), indicating a lack of awareness or ability to identify misinformation.** However, compared with audiences in other countries Australians are less likely to have encountered COVID-19 misinformation.

When asked about sources of COVID-19 misinformation, people are more worried about it coming from activists or activist groups (21%), than Australian governments and politicians (17%). No matter who is the source of the misinformation about COVID-19, Australians are more concerned about encountering it on Facebook (30%) than other media channels. This concern about Facebook is shared across the globe.

## WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE DISSATISFIED WITH HOW THEY ARE REPRESENTED IN THE NEWS

Most Australians are satisfied with the way news represents them. However, there are certain groups who are dissatisfied. **Women, younger generations and those with low income are less likely to see themselves or their views as being fairly or sufficiently reflected in the news.** Residents in regional areas are also more likely to feel that people in their area are under-represented in news coverage compared to city dwellers. When it comes to political news, both left-wing and right-wing audiences believe their political views are unfairly represented. Almost one-third of Australians (30%) don't know if the news coverage of their political views is fair or not. News consumers who believe that news coverage of their political views is sufficient and fair are more trusting of news.

## AUSTRALIANS ARE UNAWARE THAT NEWS ORGANISATIONS ARE FINANCIALLY STRUGGLING

**The majority of Australians (66%) are either unaware that commercial news organisations are less profitable than they were 10 years ago, or they don't know about the current financial state of the news media.** Further, there is little concern (34%) about the state of the news industry and low willingness to pay for news.

Only 13% of Australians are paying for online news, which is below the global average (17%). Despite the importance of credible news and information during the pandemic and early increases in consumption, we haven't seen an increase in the number of Australians paying for news. **The vast majority of those who are currently not paying (83%) say it is unlikely that they will pay in the future.**

[3] Park, S., Fisher, C., Lee, J. & McGuinness, K. (2020). *COVID-19: Australian news and misinformation*. Canberra: News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra. https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-07/apo-nid306728.pdf
[4] As above
[5] As above

Many consumers don't think the government should step in to assist commercial news organisations either (44%). Given that most Australians are neither aware of the financial state of the commercial news industry, nor concerned about it, this is not surprising.

## LOCAL NEWSPAPERS HELP GENERATE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Local news continues to be an important part of people's news diets. The majority (81%) of Australians access local news and information regularly. **The data show, local newspapers and their websites are considered the best destination for news and information about local politics and government, COVID-19, and the local economy.** For many other topics, such as weather, things to do, and job listings, consumers prefer to use search engines. This underscores the important role newspapers play in the democratic life of local communities, and the gaps in local coverage provided by other digital options.

The data clearly highlight the important role of local newspapers in generating a sense of community, particularly among older news consumers. **People who primarily get their news from print (newspaper or magazine) are more likely to say they feel attached to their local community (73%), than those who rely on other news sources.**

**We also find a sense of attachment to the local community is an indicator of engagement with news.** Those who feel attached to the people who live in their city, district, town, or village are more likely to be interested in news (61%) than those who do not feel attached (43%). They are also more likely to be heavier news consumers (57%) than those who do not feel connected to their community (51%). Younger people and city dwellers are less likely to say they feel attached to people living in their area.

## AUSTRALIANS STRONGLY SUPPORT IMPARTIAL AND BALANCED NEWS

Most news consumers (73%) think news should reflect a range of views so that audiences can make up their own mind. Seventy-one percent think all sides of an issue should be given equal time, and 57% say news should always try to be neutral. **Although the line between news, opinion, and advertising has blurred in recent years, news consumers still support the ideals of impartiality and objectivity in news.** However, consumers who prefer news to take a position on issues are more likely to pay for news and they are also more trusting.

## LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC AUSTRALIANS LACK MEDIA LITERACY

Australians from low socio-economic backgrounds are the least aware of issues impacting on the news media. Those with low education are less likely to know their political orientation (29%), more likely to have low interest in news (55%) and politics (78%), and one-tenth are extremely low or non-users of news. Less than one-third (30%) are aware of misinformation and 78% do not know the financial state of the news industry. They are also more likely not to know if the news represents them fairly or sufficiently, and whether news should be impartial.

## CONTINUAL SHIFT TO SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NEWS

The decline in TV and print news is emblematic of the gradual shift away from traditional news platforms towards online and social media news sources. In 2021, about one-quarter (23%) of news consumers primarily used social media for news, which is a 5-percentage point increase from 2019. The rise is particularly noticeable among older people. **The proportion of Australians aged 75+ who mainly use social media for news has more than tripled since 2019 (10%, +7).**

## FACEBOOK IS LESS POPULAR FOR NEWS

**General use of Facebook has hardly changed since 2016 (69% vs 67%), but the percentage of people using it to access news has dropped from 45% in 2016 to 33% in 2021.** This survey was conducted before Facebook's brief removal of Australian news early this year. Among Gen Z, YouTube (35%) has just overtaken Facebook (34%) as the most popular social media platform for news.

## AUSTRALIANS CONSUME NEWS ON FACEBOOK INCIDENTALLY, NOT INTENTIONALLY

While on social media, many say they are exposed to news incidentally rather than actively seeking it. **Almost half of those who use Facebook for news (46%) say they mainly see news while they are on it for other reasons.** When they do see news, it is most likely to come from mainstream news outlets or journalists.

## INCREASINGLY MOBILE

The uptake of news via online and social media coincides with the steady growth of mobile devices. Mobile phones are used by 63% of Australians to get news and they are now the main device to do so for 45% of consumers. This is a 16-percentage point increase since 2016 and a 4-percentage point increase from last year.

**This year's report reveals that news organisations have not been able to sustain the highs of consumption, interest, and trust experienced during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.** In times of crisis people turn to trusted sources of news and information. However, the high level of trust in news about COVID-19 has neither been transferred to news generally, nor has it led to more people paying for news.

Nevertheless, the desire for impartial news from consumers, and the glimpse of higher trust during the early months of the pandemic when news outlets largely reported informative and constructive news about COVID-19, point to possible ways to help rebuild trust.

The data show people who do understand the financial difficulty facing the news industry are much more likely to pay for news compared to those who do not know, but the majority either don't know or incorrectly believe the industry is more profitable than it really is. Increasing community awareness about the funding crisis in Australian journalism might be one way to encourage more people to pay for news.

**The lack of awareness about the financial difficulty facing the news media is just one of several findings in this report highlighting low levels of media literacy and engagement, particularly among people from low socio-economic backgrounds.** Recent research indicates that those with higher media literacy are more likely to be active citizens in a democratic society[6]. Compared to other Western countries, Australians have lower media literacy levels[7]. This continues to be a critical policy issue for Australia.

# KEY FINDINGS

### TRUST AND MISINFORMATION (Chapter 6)

- Trust in news has rebounded (+5) to 43% but is well below the high of 53% trust in COVID-19 news coverage found in April 2020.
- **Gen Z records the biggest increase in trust (+15) to 39%.**
- Concern about misinformation remains high and steady (64%).
- Misinformation about COVID-19 was encountered the most (38%), followed by politics (33%), and climate change (29%).
- Low educated consumers are less likely to know if they have encountered misinformation and are the least concerned about it.

### NEWS ACCESS (Chapter 4)

- News consumption has fallen from the COVID-19 high.
- Interest in the news continues to decline, with those expressing high interest down from 64% in 2016 to 52% in 2021.
- **54% of Gen Z say social media is their main source of news (+7 since 2019).**
- The proportion of those 75+ who use social media as their main source of news has tripled since 2019.
- Almost half of Australian news consumers (45%) say that a mobile phone is their main device for accessing news online.

### EMERGING NEWS HABITS (Chapter 5)

- While overall use of social media for news has stayed around the same, the use of Facebook for news has gradually decreased since 2016.
- Almost half of those who use Facebook for news (46%) say they mainly see news incidentally while they are on there for other reasons.
- **While using platforms for news, Facebook (31%), Twitter (32%) and YouTube (30%) users say they mostly pay attention to mainstream news outlets and journalists.**
- News consumers are increasingly sharing news on messaging apps and less on social media.
- The most common reasons given for not listening to podcasts are lack of time (22%) and podcasts not providing anything that can't be found elsewhere (19%).

[6] Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. 2021, *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs*. Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra. https://westernsydney.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1824640/Australian_adult_media_literacy_report_2021.pdf
[7] Park, S., Fisher, C., Fuller, G. & Lee, J. (2018). *Digital News Report: Australia 2018*. Canberra: News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra. http://apo.org.au/node/174861

## PAYING FOR NEWS AND FUNDING JOURNALISM (Chapter 7)

- The number of people paying for online news has hardly changed since 2020, with 13% (-1) saying they pay for news and 7% (-1) paying for ongoing subscriptions.
- Among non-payers, only 12% say they are likely to pay in the next 12 months; Gen Y is the most likely to pay in the future (21%).
- Only a third of Australians are aware that news outlets are less profitable than a decade ago or are concerned about it.
- **Even though regional newspapers have been particularly hit hard during the pandemic, regional Australians are less likely to say they will pay for news in the future (10%) compared to city dwellers (14%).**
- 44% of Australians oppose the government assisting commercial news organisations that are in financial difficulty.

## LOCAL NEWS (Chapter 1)

- The majority of Australians access local news and information regularly (81%).
- The most popular topics are local weather (55%), COVID-19 news (36%), local crime news (27%), and information about shops and restaurants (25%).
- Local newspapers and their websites are considered the best source of news and information about local politics and government.
- **Only half of Australians feel attached to their local community (53%), but newspaper readers feel the most connected (73%).**
- People who trust news are much more likely to feel attached to their local community (63%) than those who distrust news (49%).

## NEWS REPRESENTATION (Chapter 3)

- More than half of Australians think the news media represent people like themselves sufficiently and fairly.
- A quarter of Gen Z women (26%) think they are under-represented in the news compared to 11% of Gen Z men.
- Regional news consumers are more likely to feel the coverage of where they live is insufficient and unfair.
- Those on low incomes are more likely to say there is not enough news coverage of their social and economic class (23%) and that it is unfair (30%).
- **Perceptions of sufficient and fair coverage, particularly of political views, are associated with trust in news.**

## IMPARTIALITY OF NEWS (CHAPTER 2)

- 73% agree news should present a range of views and 10% say news outlets should take a stand.
- 57% agree news should always be neutral, while 28% say there is no point being neutral on some issues.
- 71% think all sides of an issue should be given equal time.
- **Younger generations, and those who use social media as a main source of news, are less supportive of the ideals of impartiality, neutrality, and equal time.**
- The majority of both news 'trusters' and 'distrusters' agree that impartiality, neutrality, and giving equal time to all sides are important.

## POLITICAL ORIENTATION AND POLARISATION (Chapter 8)

- Only one-third of Australians have high interest in politics.
- **More than one-quarter of those with low education (29%) 'don't know' their political orientation.**
- Online news brands and public service broadcasters are more likely to have left-leaning audiences.
- Right-wing news consumers are more likely to say that news should reflect a range of views so people can make up their own mind (85%), than left-wing (72%) or centre (74%).
- Left-wing respondents (39%) are more likely to say there are some issues where it makes no sense for news outlets to try to be neutral, than centre (27%) and right-wing (21%).

## AUSTRALIA AND THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC (Chapter 9)

- More than half of Australians say the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on their personal circumstances (57%), much lower than the global average (74%) and the lowest among all 46 countries surveyed.
- Australians' concerns about misinformation are high (64%) but their reported experiences of misinformation about COVID-19 are much lower (38%).
- Global audiences are most concerned about Facebook as a channel for COVID-19 misinformation and are using it less for news compared with previous years.
- **Australians who use Facebook for news are more likely to find news incidentally (46%) than the global average (33%).**
- Australians are among the least interested in news, and the lightest news consumers in the global survey.


**NEWS MOMENTS**

July 23, 2020 | Melbourne enters stage-four lockdown restrictions for the second time after a sudden resurgence in COVID-19 cases. A state of disaster was declared on August 2 and the number of active cases increased to 6768 by the 7th. The Victoria-NSW border would remain closed for most of the rest of the year.

IMAGE: DANIEL POCKETT / AAP IMAGE

# 1 LOCAL NEWS

- The majority of Australians access local news and information regularly (81%).
- The most popular topics are local weather (55%), COVID-19 news (36%), local crime news (27%), and information about shops and restaurants (25%).
- Local newspapers and their websites are considered the best source of news and information about local politics and government.
- Only half of Australians feel attached to their local community (53%), but newspaper readers feel the most connected (73%).
- People who trust news are much more likely to feel attached to their local community (63%) than those who distrust news (49%).

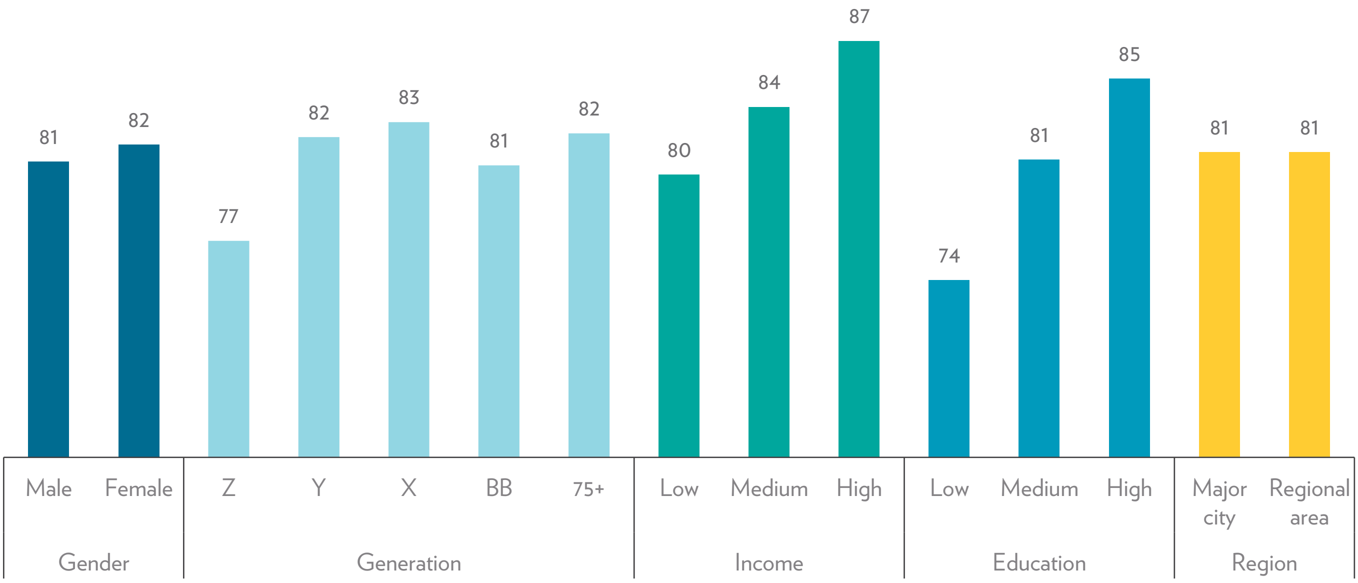
# MOST AUSTRALIANS ARE ACCESSING LOCAL NEWS AND INFORMATION

The contraction of news services over the past decade has led to increasing concern about the future of journalism, particularly in regional Australia. This has been heightened by the economic impacts of the global pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, especially during lockdown, news outlets saw a surge in their audiences. However, advertising income plunged which triggered a radical round of closures and redundancies in the news industry. According to a study conducted prior to the pandemic by the News & Media Research Centre, the vast majority of regional news consumers (88%) were accessing local news regularly. Sadly, about 1 in 5 (19%) said they had experienced a closure or merger of a news service in their area in the past five years. As a result, a quarter of regional Australians have no local TV news service or newspaper. One in three have no local commercial radio servicing their community, and more than half (55%) have no local ABC radio, which is our public broadcaster. People who live in areas that have lost a local newspaper or TV news service believe the loss of local information has reduced their sense of belonging.[1]

This year, we asked news consumers about their access to local news and information, where they get it and how much they feel attached to their local community. Local news was broadly defined in the survey as news from the city, town, municipality or immediate surrounding area that you live in. Local community was defined as people who live in your city district, town or village.

The majority of Australians (81%) say they have accessed one or more item of local news or information in the past week. There are no differences between men and women, or between city and regional news consumers in their access to local news and information. There are differences, however, between those who have higher levels of education (85%), and those with medium (81%) and lower (74%) levels of educational attainment. Those with low incomes are also slightly less likely to consume local news and information than medium and high-income earners. There are slight differences among age groups with Gen Z less likely to access local news than older generations (see **figure 1.1**).

**FIGURE 1.1**: ACCESS TO LOCAL NEWS AND INFORMATION BY DEMOGRAPHICS (%)



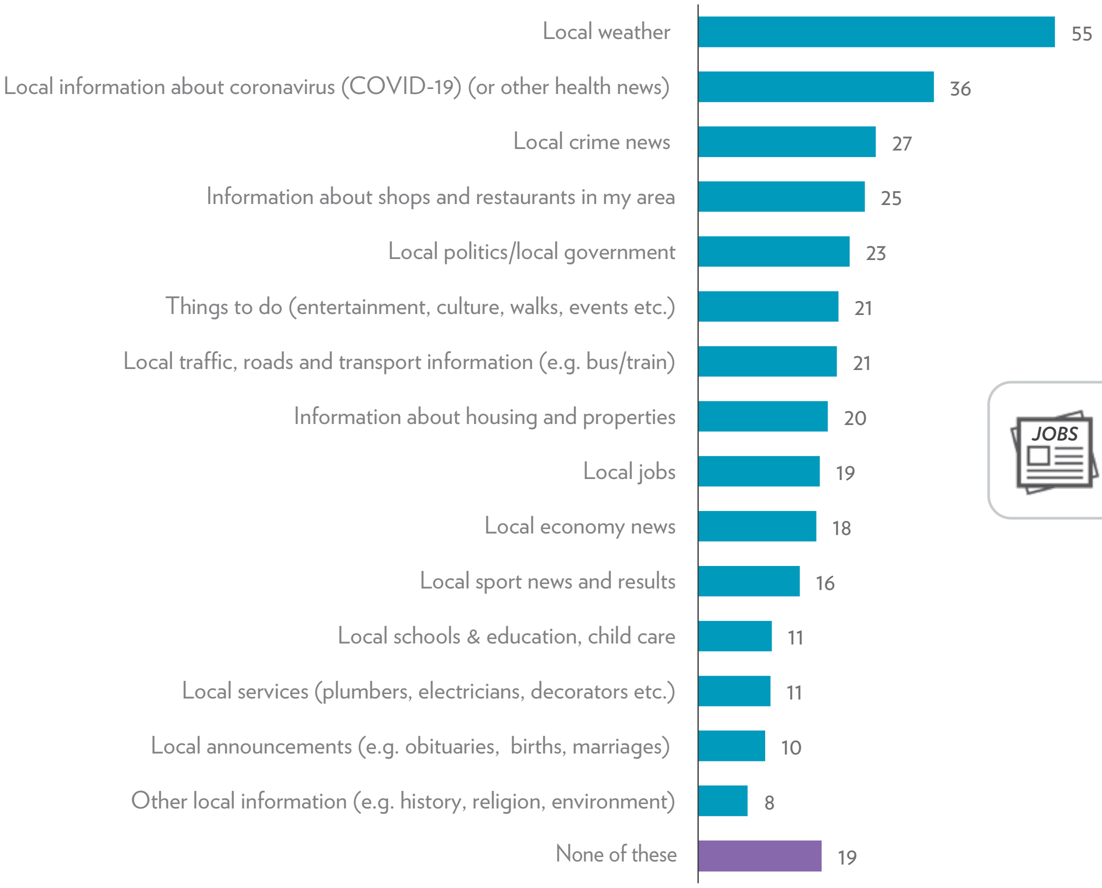

**[L6_topics_2021]** Thinking about local news and information, which of the following topics have you accessed in the past week? Please select all that apply. [Base: N=2,034]

[1] Park, S., Fisher, C. & Lee, J. (2020). *Local News Consumers*. Canberra: News & Media Research Centre. https://www.canberra.edu.au/research/faculty-research-centres/nmrc/research/local-news-consumers

## LOCAL WEATHER AND COVID-19 NEWS ARE THE MOST POPULAR TOPICS

Participants were asked to select which topics they had accessed news and information about in the past week. The most popular was 'local weather' (55%), followed by 'local COVID-19 information' (36%). Around one-quarter of news consumers said they accessed news about local crime (27%), retail information (25%), and local politics and government (23%). Almost one-fifth of Australian news consumers did not access any local news in the past week (19%) (see **figure 1.2**).

**FIGURE 1.2**: LOCAL NEWS AND INFORMATION TOPICS ACCESSED (%)

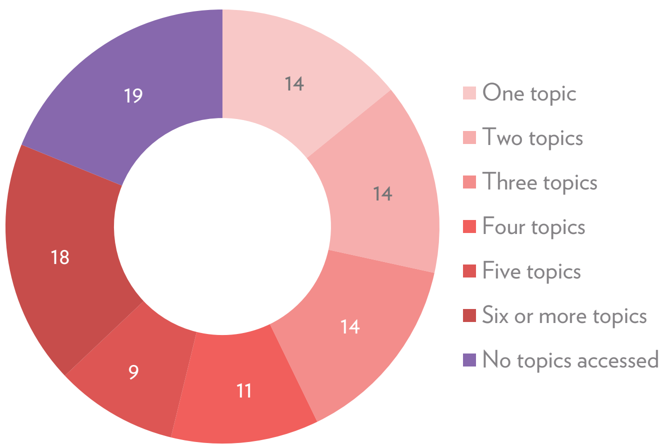



Almost **1 in 5** say they looked at **local job info**

## AUSTRALIANS CONSUME A NARROW DIET OF LOCAL NEWS AND INFORMATION

Many Australians accessed 3 or fewer local news and information topics in the past week (42%). Less than one-fifth consumed 6 or more (18%) and 14% accessed just one, 2 or 3 different information types (see **figure 1.3**). Almost one in five did not access any local news and information (19%).

**FIGURE 1.3**: THE NUMBER OF LOCAL NEWS AND INFORMATION TOPICS ACCESSED (%)



There are no differences between men and women in the number of local news topics they access. Older generations access more types of local news and information than younger generations, with 50% of those aged 75+ consuming 4 or more topics, while only one-third (33%) of Gen Z do. High income earners (42%), those with high levels of education (45%), and regional news consumers (41%), tend to consume a greater variety of local news and information (see **figure 1.4**).

**FIGURE 1.4**: NUMBER OF LOCAL NEWS AND INFORMATION TOPICS ACCESSED BY DEMOGRAPHICS (%)


## MEN AND OLDER PEOPLE ARE MORE INTERESTED IN NEWS ABOUT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Men are much more likely to access news about local politics and government (29%) than women (18%), but women are slightly more likely than men to access news and information about COVID-19, local weather, things to do, shops and restaurants (see **figure 1.5**).

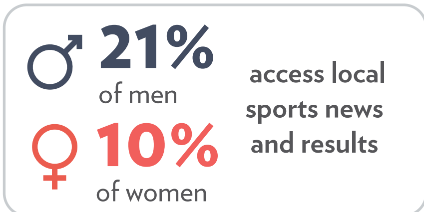
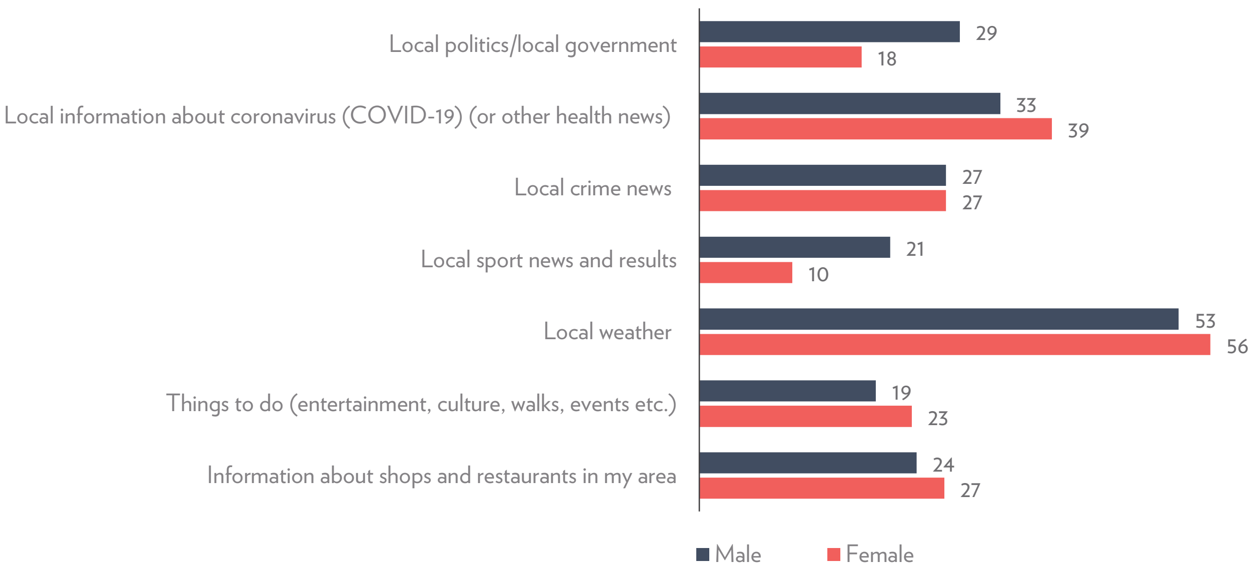
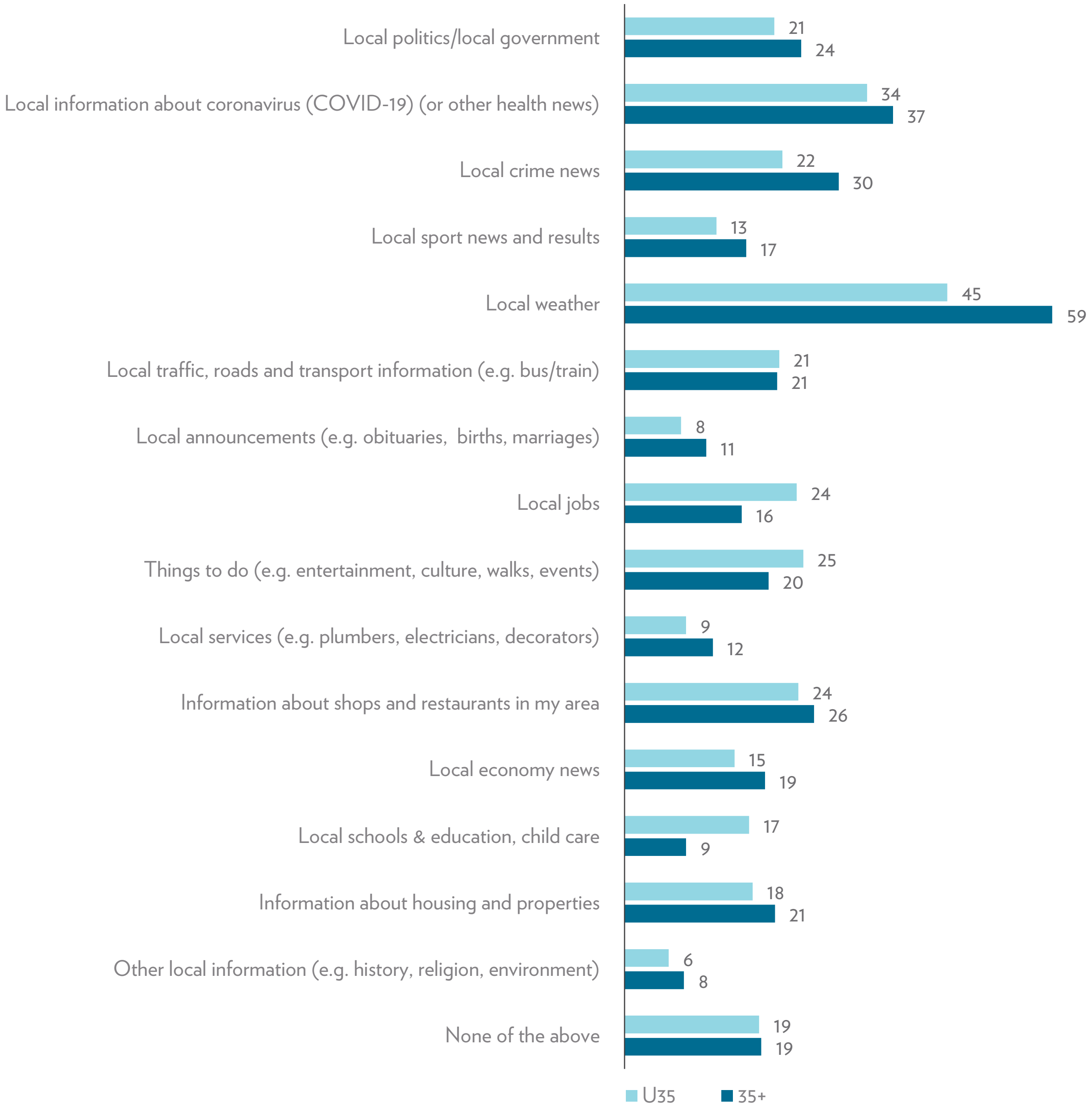



**FIGURE 1.5**: LOCAL NEWS AND INFORMATION TOPICS ACCESSED BY GENDER (%)



Those under 35 are more likely to access information about local jobs, or things to do, compared to people aged 35+. However, for all other topics, those who are 35+ access more local news and information (see **figure 1.6**).

**FIGURE 1.6**: LOCAL NEWS AND INFORMATION TOPICS ACCESSED BY AGE (%)




## LOCAL NEWSPAPERS ARE THE MOST POPULAR SOURCE OF NEWS ABOUT LOCAL POLITICS

We asked news consumers which sources offer the best information on different topics. Local newspapers and TV, including their websites, are still the most popular for traditional news topics (politics, crime, economy, and sport), while search has become the top place to go for information about local shops and restaurants, jobs listings, local tradespeople, and traffic information.

Local newspapers or their websites were ranked the top for local politics/government news, crime, local announcements, and local economy. TV was ranked the top medium for sports and COVID-19 information. Other internet sites or apps were the most popular for local weather information. Social media was not rated highly for any of the topics listed (see **table 1.1**).

**TABLE 1.1**: MOST POPULAR SOURCES OF LOCAL NEWS AND INFORMATION (%)

| | Most Popular | | Second Most Popular | | Third Most Popular | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Local politics/local government** | Local newspaper | 25 | Local TV | 19 | Local radio or their websites | 11 |
| **Local information about coronavirus (COVID-19) (or other health news)** | Local TV | 27 | Search engines (e.g., Google) | 15 | Local newspaper | 13 |
| **Local crime news** | Local newspaper | 28 | Local TV | 24 | Social media | 20 |
| **Local sport news and results** | Local TV | 28 | Local newspaper | 21 | Social media | 12 |
| **Local weather** | Other internet sites or apps | 29 | Search engines | 22 | Local TV | 19 |
| **Local traffic, roads, and transport information (e.g., bus/train)** | Search engines | 21 | Local radio or their websites | 20 | Other internet sites or apps | 13 |
| **Local announcements (e.g., obituaries, births, marriages)** | Local newspaper | 50 | Social media | 13 | Search engines | 10 |
| **Local jobs** | Search engines | 27 | Other internet sites or apps | 23 | Local newspaper | 15 |
| **Things to do (entertainment, culture, walks, events etc.)** | Search engines | 26 | Social media | 21 | Local newspaper | 20 |
| **Local services (plumbers, electricians, decorators etc.)** | Search engines | 27 | Local newspaper | 24 | Social media | 15 |
| **Information about shops and restaurants in my area** | Search engines | 41 | Social media | 18 | Local newspaper | 14 |
| **Local economy news** | Local newspaper | 27 | Local TV | 26 | Search engines | 11 |
| **Local schools & education, childcare** | Search engines | 23 | Local newspaper | 17 | Social media | 16 |
| **Information about housing and properties** | Search engines | 25 | Other internet sites or apps | 24 | Local newspaper | 18 |
| **Other local information (e.g., history, religion, environment)** | Local newspaper | 26 | Search engines | 25 | Social media | 14 |

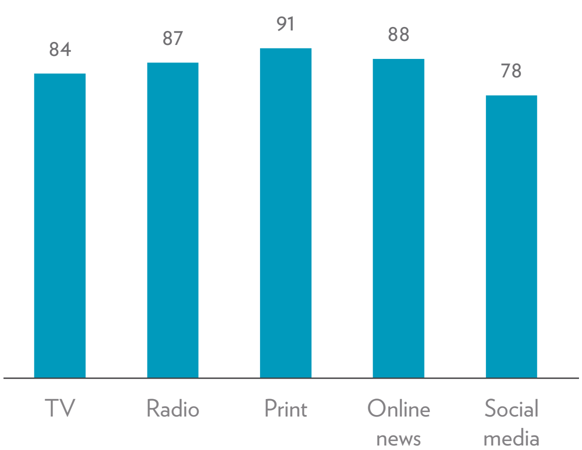
*Local newspapers include newspapers and their websites; local TV includes TV and their websites.
[L7_sources_2021] You said you have accessed local news and information about the following topic in the last week... Which sources offers the best information for you on this topic? Please select just one option. Local newspaper/freesheet or their websites; Local TV or their websites; Local radio or their websites; Independent websites serving a small neighbourhood; Social media (e.g., Facebook/local Facebook groups, Next Door); Messaging Apps (e.g., WhatsApp); Search engines (e.g., Google); Local politicians/political parties; Other internet sites or apps; None of these. Base: Those who accessed one or more local news and information topic in the last week, N=1,651

## NEWSPAPER READERS ARE THE MOST LIKELY TO CONSUME LOCAL NEWS

News consumers who primarily get their news from print sources are more likely to have accessed local news in the past week (91%) than people who mainly use TV (84%) or social media (78%) for news (see **figure 1.7**).

**78%** of social media users access local news & info

**FIGURE 1.7**: ACCESS TO LOCAL NEWS AND INFORMATION BY MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS (%)



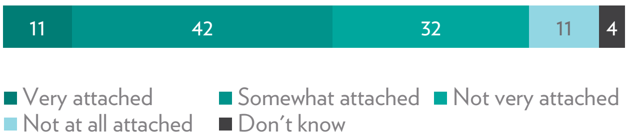

[Q4] You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your MAIN source of news. 1907.

# COMMUNITY CONNECTION

## ONLY HALF OF AUSTRALIANS FEEL ATTACHED TO THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY

In this year's report we explored the role of local news in creating a sense of belonging to the community. We asked Australian consumers to what degree they feel attached to their local community, the people who live in their city, district, town, or village. Just over a half (53%) of Australians say they feel attached (42% 'somewhat'; 11% 'very'). One in ten (11%) say they are 'not at all' attached, and 32% are 'not very' attached to their local community (see **figure 1.8**).

**FIGURE 1.8**: ATTACHMENT TO LOCAL COMMUNITY (%)

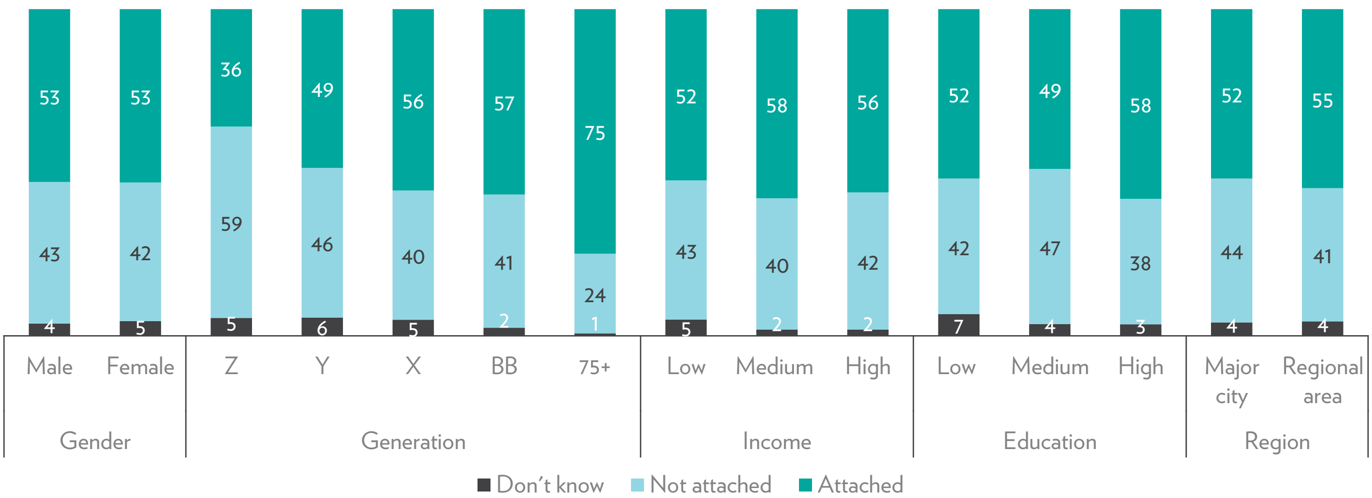



[L5_attached_2021] In general, how attached do you feel to your local community, that is, the people who live in your city district, town, or village? [Base: N=2,034].

Attachment to the local community differs with age and education. Older generations are much more likely to feel attached, with 75% of those aged 75+ saying they are 'somewhat' or 'very' attached to their local community. The figure drops to 36% among Gen Z. The proportion of Gen Z and Gen Y who say they are not attached to their community is much higher than other generations. This possibly reflects changes in younger people's understanding of community in a digital context.

Low income earners are less likely to say they feel attached compared to those with higher. Those with high education are more likely to feel attached compared to those with low or medium education levels. Those who live in regional, rural and remote areas are slightly more likely to express a sense of belonging (55%) to their local community compared to city dwellers (52%). There were no differences between men and women (see **figure 1.9**).

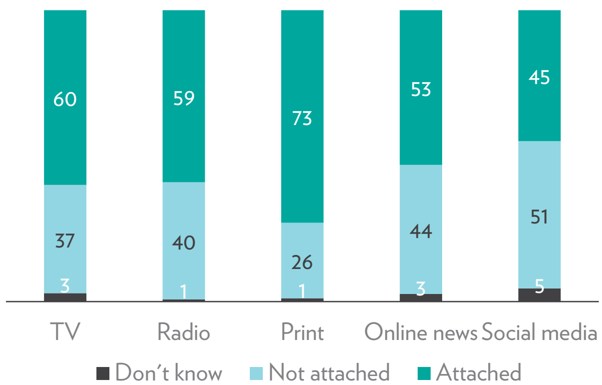
**FIGURE 1.9**: ATTACHMENT TO LOCAL COMMUNITY BY DEMOGRAPHICS (%)




## NEWSPAPER USE IS ASSOCIATED WITH ATTACHMENT TO LOCAL COMMUNITY

Australians who mainly use print (newspapers or magazines) to get their news are more likely to say they feel attached to their local community (73%), than those who rely on other news media. Overall, those who mainly use traditional news sources tend to feel more attached to their communities than those who consume news via online or social media sources (see **figure 1.10**). This is further highlighted in **table 1.2**.

**FIGURE 1.10**: ATTACHMENT TO LOCAL COMMUNITY BY MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS (%)



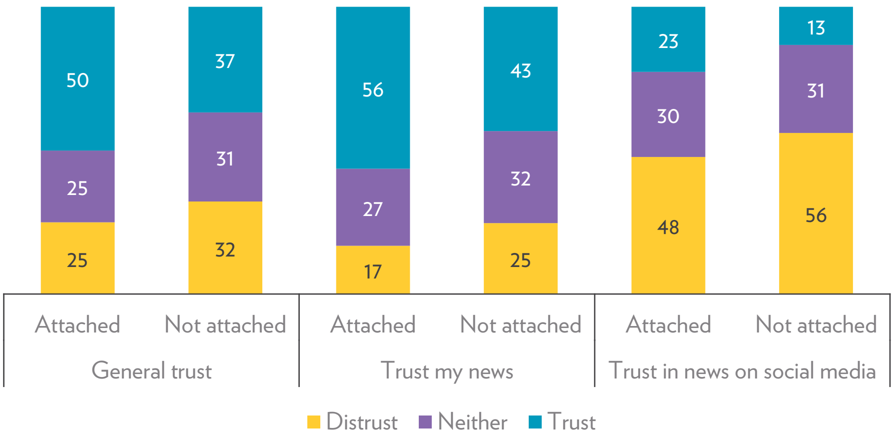

[Q4] You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your MAIN source of news. [Base: N=1909, *Excluded those who did not use TV, radio, print, online news or social media to access news]

## THOSE WHO FEEL MORE ATTACHED ARE MORE TRUSTING OF NEWS

Australians who feel attached to their local community are more likely to trust news (50%) than those who are unattached (37%). This is much higher than the average among all Australians who say they trust most news (43%).

Those who feel attached and say they trust the news they consume (56%) and news on social media (23%) are also more trusting compared to the unattached (see **figure 1.11**).

**FIGURE 1.11**: ATTACHMENT TO LOCAL COMMUNITY BY TRUST (%)

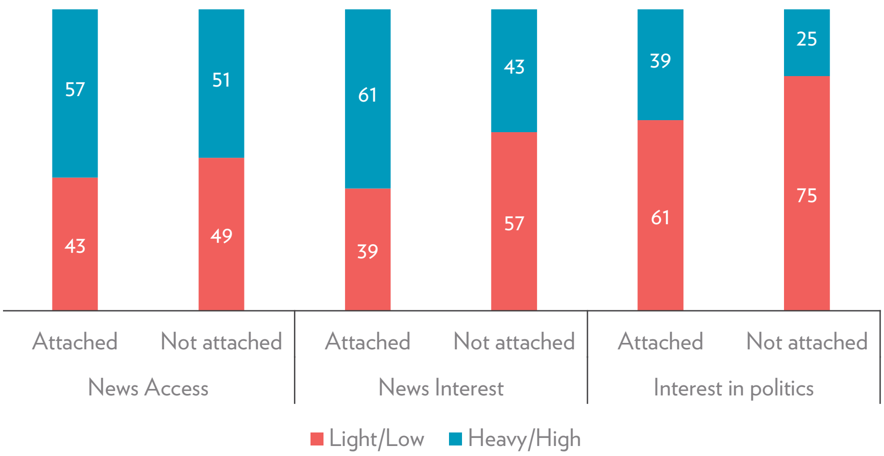



[Q6_2016_1] We are now going to ask you about trust in the news. First, we will ask you about how much you trust the news as a whole within your country. Then we will ask you about how much you trust the news that you choose to consume. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: I think you can trust most news most of the time. [Q6_2016_6] I think I can trust most of the news I consume most of the time. [Q6_2018_2] It is now possible to get online news in many different ways, including from search engines and social media sites. With this in mind, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. I think I can trust news in social media most of the time. [Q6_2018_3] I think I can trust news in search engines most of the time [Base: N=2,034] *Excluded 'Don't know' from the analysis

## THOSE WHO HAVE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY ARE MORE INTERESTED IN NEWS AND POLITICS

Those who feel attached to their local community are more likely to be interested in news (61%) than those who do not feel attached (43%). They are also more likely to be heavier news consumers (57%) than those who do not feel connected (51%). Attachment to local community is also associated with interest in politics; 39% of those who say they feel attached to their local area have higher interest in politics compared to those who say they do not (25%) (see **figure 1.12**).

**FIGURE 1.12**: ATTACHMENT TO LOCAL COMMUNITY BY NEWS ACCESS AND INTEREST (%)



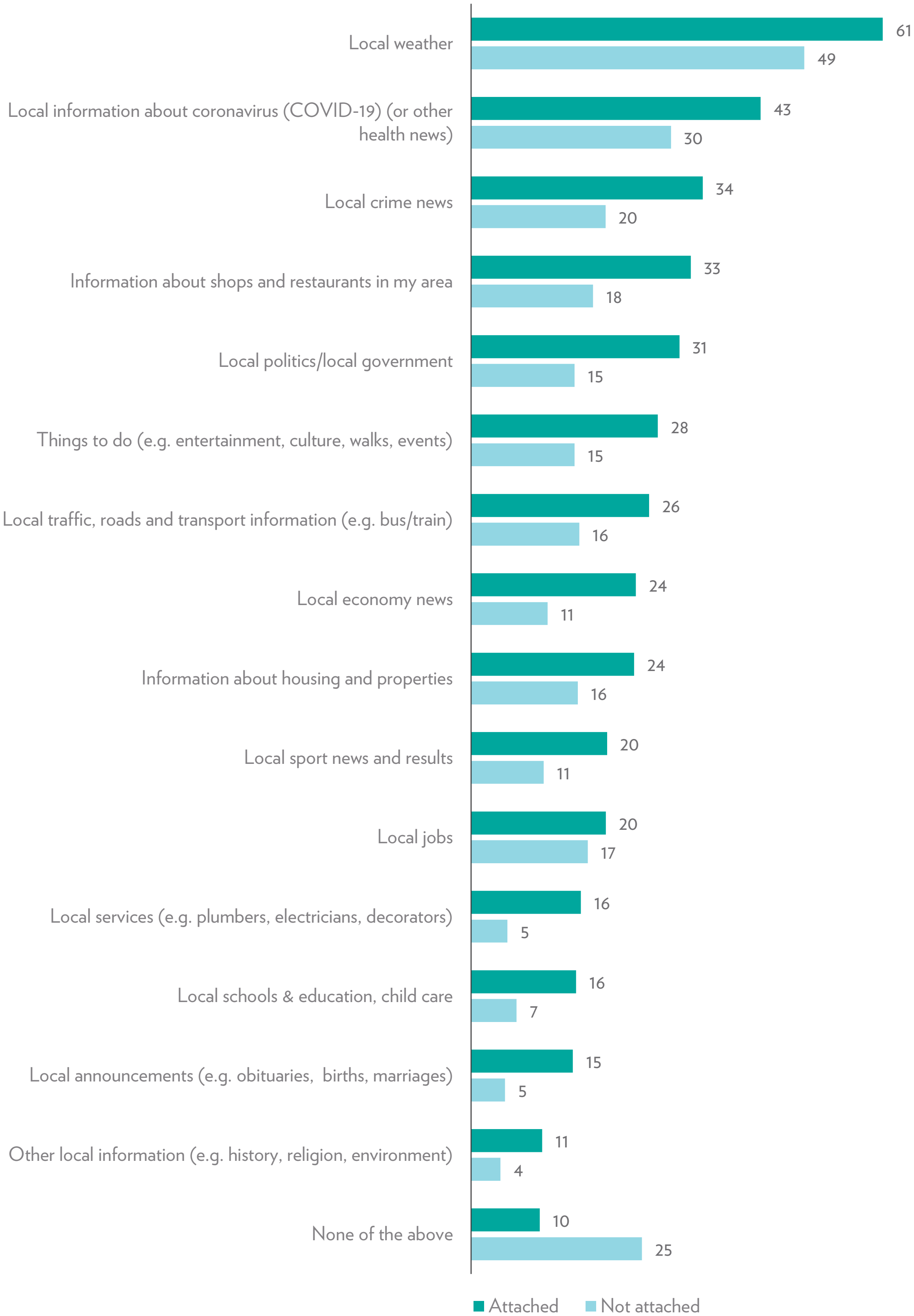

**75%** of those who are *not* attached also have low interest in politics

[Q1b_NEW] Typically, how often do you access news? By news we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper or online) [Q1c] How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news? [Q2_new2018] How interested, if at all, would you say you are in politics? [Base: N=2,034] *Excluded 'Don't know' from the analysis.

## THOSE WHO ARE MORE ATTACHED TO THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY ARE TWICE AS LIKELY TO ACCESS NEWS ABOUT LOCAL POLITICS OR GOVERNMENT

The majority of those who say they feel attached to the community accessed local news in the past week (90%), compared to 75% of those who do not feel attached. (see **figure 1.13**).

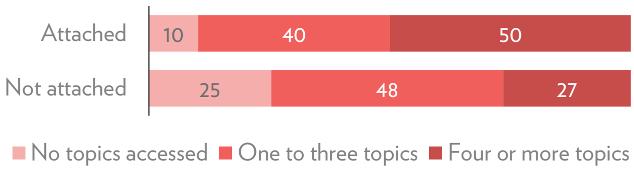
**FIGURE 1.13**: LOCAL NEWS TOPICS BY ATTACHMENT (%)



## NEWS CONSUMERS WHO FEEL ATTACHED TO THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY HAVE A MORE DIVERSE LOCAL NEWS DIET

Those who feel attached to the local community are more likely to access a diverse range of local information. Half of those who say they feel connected to their local community access more than 4 local news topics compared to 27% of those who do not feel connected (see **figure 1.14**).

**FIGURE 1.14**: NUMBER OF LOCAL NEWS TOPICS ACCESSED BY ATTACHMENT (%)




## AUSTRALIANS WHO FEEL ATTACHED TO THEIR COMMUNITY ARE MORE LIKELY TO READ THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER

The data highlight the importance of local newspapers in building a sense of community. Those who feel connected to their local community are much more likely to go to local newspapers and their websites, than use TV or search to get local news and information These consumers ranked local newspapers/websites number one in 8 categories, ranging from local politics and government to local announcements, births deaths and marriages, and things to do. In contrast, those who say they do not feel attached to their community nominated newspapers/websites only once, and are more likely to get local news and information from searching the internet or watching TV. The data demonstrate the role of local newspapers and their websites goes beyond providing news about current affairs. They also provide local information that is important to citizens' everyday lives and is harder to find elsewhere (see **table 1.2**).

**TABLE 1.2**: TOP SOURCE OF LOCAL NEWS BY ATTACHMENT (%)

| | Attached | | Not attached | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Local politics/local government** | Local newspaper | 27 | Local TV | 23 |
| **Local information about coronavirus (COVID-19) (or other health news)** | Local TV | 28 | Local TV | 23 |
| **Local crime news** | Local newspaper | 31 | Local TV | 25 |
| **Local sport news and results** | Local TV | 32 | Search engines | 21 |
| **Local weather** | Other internet sites or apps | 27 | Other internet sites or apps | 32 |
| **Local traffic, roads and transport information (e.g., bus/train)** | Local radio or their websites | 22 | Search engines | 28 |
| **Local announcements (e.g., obituaries, births, marriages)** | Local newspaper | 53 | Local newspaper | 39 |
| **Local jobs** | Search engines | 28 | Search engines | 28 |
| **Things to do (e.g., entertainment, culture, walks, events)** | Local newspaper, Search engines | 21 | Search engines | 36 |
| **Local services (e.g., plumbers, electricians, decorators)** | Local newspaper | 26 | Search engines | 33 |
| **Information about shops and restaurants in my area** | Search engines | 36 | Search engines | 51 |
| **Local economy news** | Local newspaper | 32 | Local TV | 25 |
| **Local schools & education, childcare** | Local newspaper | 20 | Search engines | 35 |
| **Information about housing and properties** | Search engines | 25 | Other internet sites or apps | 35 |
| **Other local information (e.g., history, religion, environment)** | Local newspaper | 31 | Search engines | 45 |

## SUMMARY

The report shows that interest in local news and information is strong, with most Australians (81%) accessing information about their community regularly. Local weather news is the most popular topic among consumers (55%), followed by local information about COVID-19 (36%). Traditional local news staples, like crime (27%) and local government (23%), are also popular.

However, where news consumers get that local news and information differs. While there is a clear trend towards using the internet and online platforms this varies according to the age the consumer, their level of community attachment, and the topic of interest.

For 'hard news' such as local politics, economy, crime and health, local news consumers continue to turn to traditional local news outlets, such as the newspaper or TV. However, for most other news and information, consumers are using internet search and other internet sites to get localised information.

Younger generations, who say they feel less attached to their local community, and who also access social media widely for general news, are more likely to seek local news and information from the internet and online platforms.

2020 was a difficult year in Australian news sector, with news companies closing or suspended[1]. This is in part a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but it reflects a longer-term gradual decline in newspaper consumption that is replaced by online offerings. Local and regional newspapers, in particular, have faced difficulties adapting to a digital first market for advertising. A further study conducted by the News & Media Research Centre revealed that news consumers who experienced the closure of a local news outlet felt it had a negative impact on their community and a reduction in their sense of belonging[2].

In this context, this year's data highlight the important role of newspapers in generating a sense of community, particularly among older news consumers[3]. Further, newspapers are perceived to be the best source of information about local government and politics, which is central to the functioning and accountability of local communities. It is important for industry and government to remember that the closure of a local newspaper not only leaves a gap in the provision of quality news, but also a loss of critical information that is connected to people's sense of attachment to their community.

[1] Public Interest Journalism Initiative (2021). Newsroom changes January 2019—March 2021. The Australian Newsroom Mapping Project. https://anmp.piji.com.au/
[2] Park, S., Fisher, C. & Lee, J. (2020). *Local News Consumers*. Canberra: News & Media Research Centre. https://www.canberra.edu.au/research/faculty-research-centres/nmrc/research/local-news-consumers
[3] Similar results were found in recent studies by the N&MRC: Park, S., Fisher, C., Lee, J.. (2021) *Regional news audiences' value perception of local news*,Journalism, 1-19.; Fisher, Park, Lee, Holland, John (2021) Older people's news dependency and social connectedness, MIA, online first.

# COMMENTARY

## AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL NEWS HAS BEEN HIT HARD, BUT THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT IS KEEPING JOURNALISM ALIVE

**Simon Crerar**, Co-founder of *PS Media, a local news startup

Solving the local news crisis has been described as the hardest of hard problems. The business model is under immense pressure, consumers are overwhelmed by disinformation and misinformation, and trust in news has cratered. The problem is acute: Australia has almost 50% fewer working journalists than it did 15 years ago[1], and community-focused mastheads have been the hardest hit.

**The coronavirus has put slow-motion, long-term media declines into warp speed, and the impact on the local news publishing landscape has been brutal.**

The Public Interest Journalism Initiative's Australian Newsroom Mapping Project tracks 199 contractions since 2019. Why does this matter? Feeling heard, and connected to the affairs of the nation, is vital for local cohesiveness and functional democracy. A world that relies solely on Facebook, Nextdoor or YouTube for local news is a world where our institutions can crumble.

As trust in technology declines, the numbers of Australians who feel attached to their local community is plunging. But importantly, this year's *Digital News Report* shows shows those who trust news are more likely to feel attached to their local community (63%) versus those who distrust news (49%). If established local publishers can survive and news startups thrive, evidence shows that they will play an important role in keeping communities cohesive, and provide a bulwark against falling trust in news. But despite encouraging exceptions, the overall trend is one of decline.

Last year News Corp shut-down 114 local print editions in metropolitan and regional areas[2], closing 18 entirely while pledging that the rest would continue to be published online. Dozens of these titles have now been absorbed by their nearest metro tabloid's website, with readers asked to subscribe to the Courier-Mail or Daily Telegraph instead of a local title. News Corp has also used this hyperlocal strategy to roll out 21 new localised hyperlocal news services in locations the company has never had a masthead — including the Barossa, Bowral and Bendigo. But it's not only Australia's biggest publisher News Corp which is innovating.

**Hearteningly, PIJI's mapping data shows dozens of services launching last year in the recently expanded news deserts.**

Meanwhile Australian Community Media has this year restarted scores of local titles suspended in 2020 — helped by funds from the government's $50m Public Interest News Gathering Fund COVID relief program — while announcing the closure of a number of websites where advertising support did not recover enough to make them sustainable.

In Sydney's northern beaches, News Corp's closure of the 115-year-old Manly Daily in April 2020 inspired — not one, not two, but three! — local news entrepreneurs to launch products, including two digital-only titles — the *Manly Observer* and the *Northern Beaches Advocate* — and a monthly magazine: the *Tawny Frogmouth*. While this particularly affluent location is a bit of an outlier — ACM also launched a free weekly beaches property/lifestyle magazine in 2020 — across the nation the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and kicking.

In April, the Judith Neilson Institute convened a two-day Hyperlocal Summit featuring more than 50 Australian publishers exploring the challenges and opportunities facing the sector. The event heard from the UK's Independent Community News Network and the USA's Local Independent Online News Publishers association, while showing promising signs of a grassroots Aussie local news collective springing to life to share war stories and growth strategies.

In Europe and North America such vibrant communities of local news innovators are helping to build viable

[1] Source: New Beats, MEAA
[2] Source: PIJI's Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report

futures for digital news. Powered by smart value propositions and diversified revenue streams publications like Denmark's *Zetland*, Holland's *De Correspondent*, the UK's *Bristol Cable*, Canada's *Indiegraf* and the USA's *City Cast* are experimenting — and scaling fast.

Philanthropy and government support are also playing major roles internationally. This year the Knight, MacArthur and Packard Foundation-backed Report for America placed another 300 journalists in local news organisations across 49 US states to report on under-covered issues and communities. In the UK 165 reporters are covering councils and other public services for local news orgs as part of the Local Democracy Reporting Service, a project just renewed for the next three years by the licence-fee funded BBC, while the Canadian government's Local Journalism Initiative has now placed 160 reporters in news deserts since its 2020 launch.

Here Google and Facebook have been pressured to pay Australian publishers for content on their platforms, but there's no clarity yet on how effectively this will help small local mastheads. Our inability to track whether deals struck outside the mandatory bargaining code will lead to dollars being directly spent on public interest journalism contrasts with the public transparency over the hundreds of millions spent by the platforms on local news innovation projects internationally in recent years. Efforts such as Facebook's Local News Subscription Accelerator and Google's Innovation Challenge and Startup Labs, plus Twitter's recent All News Is Local News campaign are visibly elevating local reporters' stories.

While the impact of the deals struck behind closed-doors between the digital platforms and the publishers is yet to flow into adverts for local news reporters on the job boards of NewsCorp, Nine Entertainment, and Seven West Media (at the time of writing), smaller publishers remain hopeful that they will eventually get a piece of the pie. Encouragingly the ACCC recently gave the Country Press Association permission to collectively negotiate on behalf of their 81 members.

The growth of a rich ecosystem of collaboration, business model innovation, and multiple tiers of financial support are vital to help all sectors of local news publishing survive and thrive.

In June Nieman Lab reported that non-profit journalism in the US grew substantially in 2020, with individual donors playing an increasingly large part[1]. Now, how about philanthropic tax incentives for journalism here Mr Treasurer?

[1] https://www.niemanlab.org/2021/06/nonprofit-journalism-grew-in-2020-and-individual-donors-played-an-increasingly-large-part/


**NEWS MOMENTS**

February 15, 2021 | Brittany Higgins went public with accusations she was raped at Parliament House by a Liberal Party staffer. She would later address the Women's March 4 Justice in Canberra to raise awareness of sexual harassment against women in the workplace.

IMAGE: LUKAS COCH / AAP IMAGE

# 2 IMPARTIALITY OF NEWS

- 73% agree news should present a range of views and 10% say news outlets should take a stand.
- 57% agree news should always be neutral, while 28% contend there is no point being neutral on some issues.
- 71% think all sides of an issue should be given equal time.
- Younger generations, and those who use social media as the main source of news are less supportive of the ideals of impartiality, neutrality, and equal time.
- The majority of both news ‘trusters’ and ‘distrusters’ agree that impartiality, neutrality, and giving equal time to all sides are important.

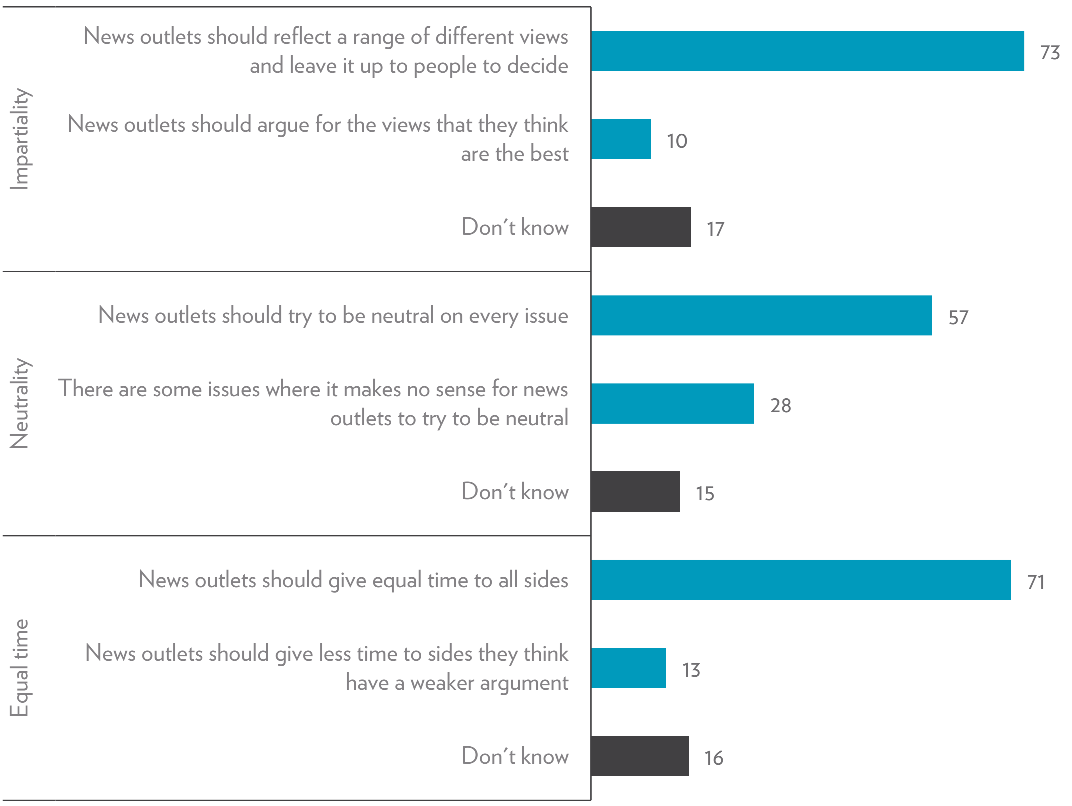
Building on *Digital News Report: Australia 2020*, this year's report further explores the views of Australian news consumers in relation to issues of impartiality in the news.

Traditionally, values of independence, and impartiality — or 'objectivity' — have been central to journalism's mission and deemed important to perceptions of trust in news. However, in the digital media environment, former demarcations between news, features, opinion, and advertising continue to blur. Further, in many countries surveyed, news audiences are becoming more polarised and are increasingly attracted to news brands that offer partisan perspectives. In this context, Australian consumers were asked three questions related to impartiality, neutrality, and giving equal time to different perspectives in news.

## THERE IS A STRONG PREFERENCE FOR IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS AMONG AUSTRALIANS

Almost three-quarters of survey participants (73%) think news outlets should reflect a range of views so that the audience can make up its own mind about an issue. In contrast, only 10% agreed that news outlets should argue for the view they think is best and 17% say they don't know enough to express a view. More than half (57%) of participants agreed that news outlets should be neutral on all issues, and 28% said there are some issues where it makes no sense for news outlets to be neutral. Similarly, 71% of consumers agreed that news outlets should give equal time to all sides of a story, and only 13% agreed with the proposition that news outlets should give less time to sides they think have a weaker argument (see **figure 2.1**).

**FIGURE 2.1**: SUPPORT FOR IMPARTIALITY, NEUTRALITY AND EQUAL TIME (%)



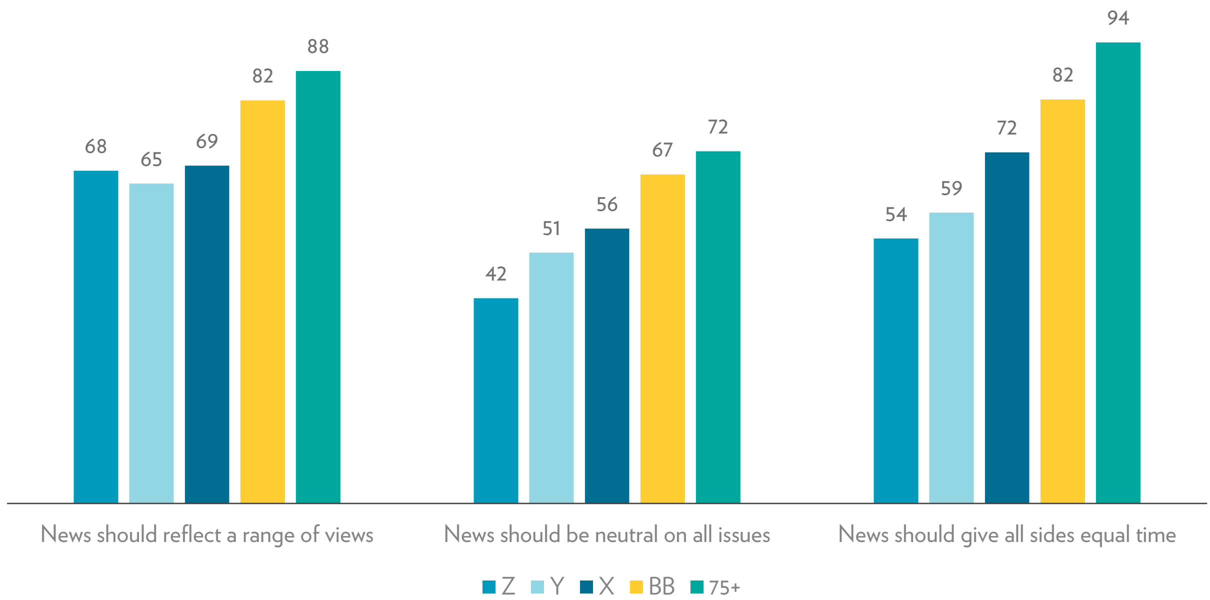

[Q_IMPARTIAL1_2021] Thinking about the news in general in your country, when news outlets report on social and political issues, which of the following comes closest to your view? [Base: All=2,034]

## GENERATIONAL DIVIDE ON IMPARTIALITY IN JOURNALISM

Despite the strong overall agreement with the ideals of impartiality, neutrality and giving equal time to all sides of an issue, there is a significant variation across generations. As **figure 2.2** shows, Baby Boomers and 75+ are much more likely than younger generations to support the notion that a range of views should be provided in a news story so that the consumer can make up their own mind. Sixty-eight percent of Gen Z support this traditional journalism ideal, compared to 82% of Baby Boomers and 88% of 75+.

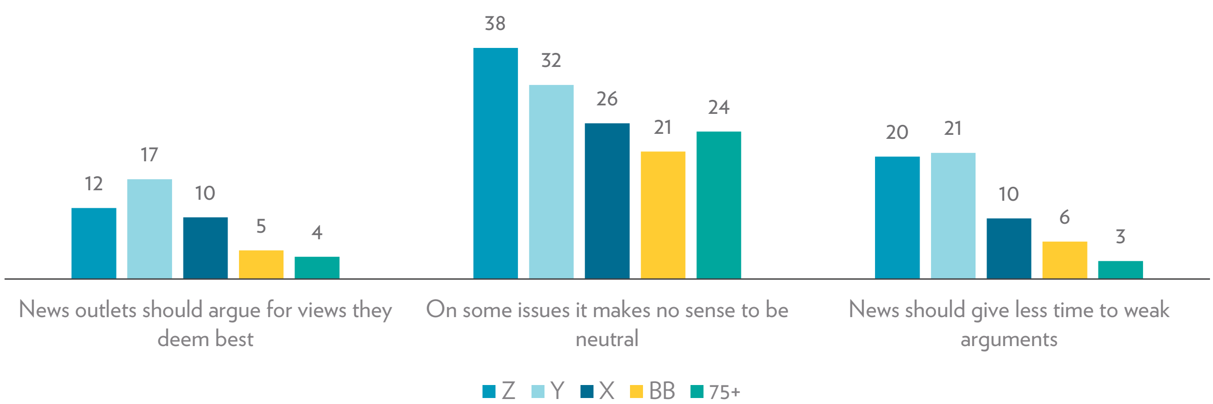
The generational divide is starker in relation to giving equal time to all sides of a story. Just over half (54%) of Gen Z agree with this compared to 94% of 75+. When it comes to the idea that news outlets should remain neutral on all issues, 42% of Gen Z support this proposition compared to 72% of those aged 75+.

**FIGURE 2.2**: SUPPORT FOR IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY GENERATION (%)




As **figure 2.3** shows, the gap in opinion across generations is smaller in relation to propositions that support news outlets taking a stand on issues, rather than acting impartially. There is only an 8 percentage point difference between Gen Z (12%) and 75+ (4%) in favour of news outlets arguing for views they consider best; and a 12 percentage point difference in agreement over 'there are some issues where it makes no sense for news outlets to be neutral' (38% of Gen Z and 24% of 75+). Nonetheless, it is clear that younger generations are more supportive of news outlets expressing or supporting an opinion, than older generations. This suggests that a strong commitment to traditional journalistic ideal of impartiality.

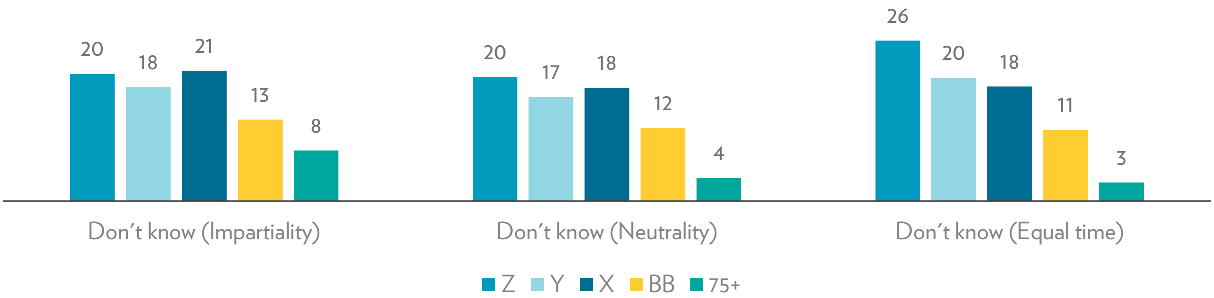
**FIGURE 2.3**: SUPPORT FOR LACK OF IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY GENERATION (%)



## YOUNGER GENERATIONS ARE UNSURE ABOUT TRADITIONAL JOURNALISTIC VALUES

**Figure 2.4** combines those who responded 'don't know' to the three questions on impartiality, neutrality, and equal time. Among Gen Z, more than a quarter say they don't know if news should give equal time to all sides or less time to weaker positions (26%). Older survey participants tend to be more certain in their views, with only a small proportion saying they didn't know.

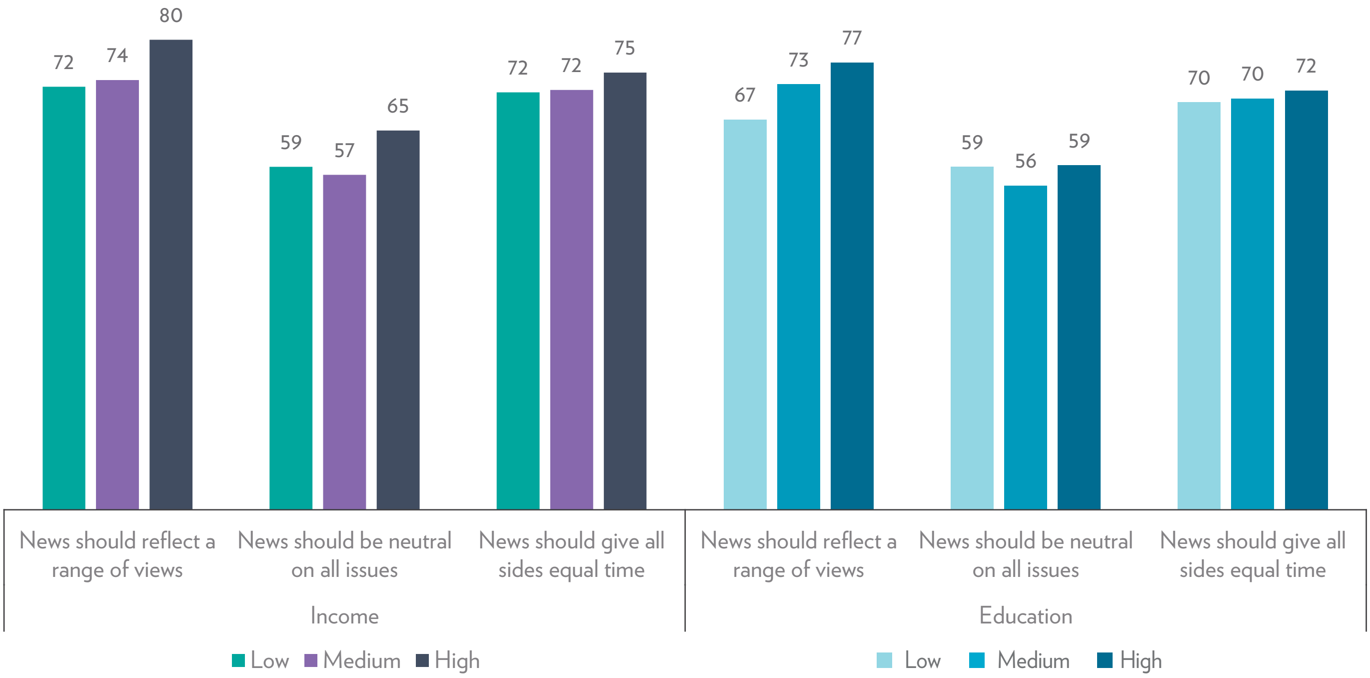
**FIGURE 2.4**: UNSURENESS ABOUT SUPPORT FOR IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY GENERATION (%)




## HIGHLY EDUCATED ARE THE MOST SUPPORTIVE OF THE IDEALS OF IMPARTIALITY, NEUTRALITY AND EQUAL TIME IN REPORTING

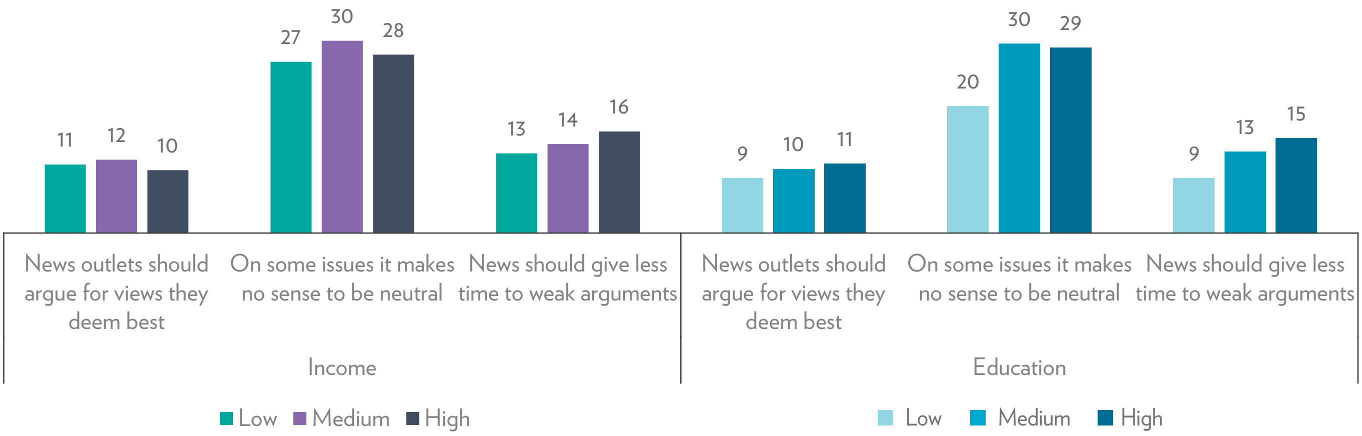
Audiences with higher levels of education and income are more likely to be in favour of news outlets reflecting a range of different views so that the audience can make up its own mind. Eighty percent of high-income earners and 77% of highly educated participants support this proposition, compared to 72% of low-income earners and 67% of those with low education. The distinction is less pronounced in relation to neutrality and giving equal time to all sides of an issue (see **figure 2.5**).

**FIGURE 2.5**: SUPPORT FOR IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY INCOME AND EDUCATION (%)




Interestingly, the proposition that news outlets should give less time to sides of an argument they deem weaker, also drew stronger support — though much lower — from those with higher levels of education (15%) and income (16%), compared to those with lower education (9%) and income (13%). The biggest difference can be in seen in relation to the idea that there are some issues where it makes no sense for news outlets to be neutral — climate change represents a good example of this. News consumers with low education (20%) express less support for this proposition than those with medium (30%) or high (29%) levels of educational attainment (see **figure 2.6**).

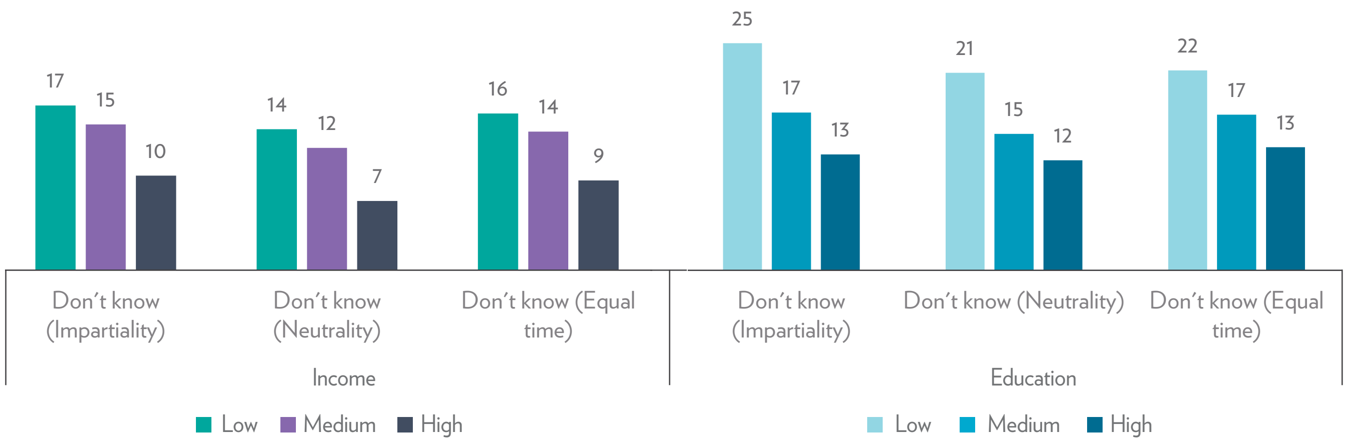
**FIGURE 2.6**: SUPPORT FOR A LACK OF IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY INCOME AND EDUCATION (%)




## THOSE WITH LOW EDUCATION ARE LESS CERTAIN OF THEIR VIEWS ON IMPARTIALITY

**Figure 2.7** combines those who responded 'don't know' to the questions on impartiality, neutrality, and equal time. Twenty-five percent of those with low education say they don't know if news should reflect a range of views or argue for the views they deem best. In comparison, those with high education are more certain and hold a position either way. A similar pattern is seen with income, though it is not as strong a predictor as education.

**FIGURE 2.7**: UNSURENESS ABOUT SUPPORT FOR IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY INCOME AND EDUCATION (%)




## HIGH INTEREST IN NEWS AND POLITICS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH SUPPORT FOR IMPARTIALITY

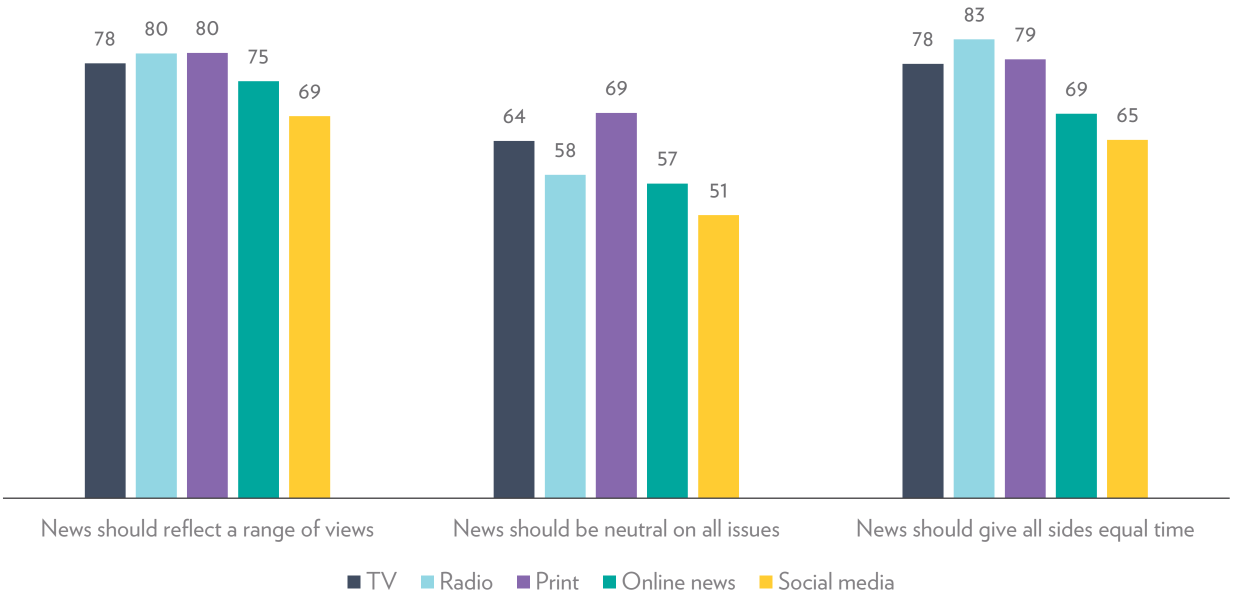
Heavy news consumers, and people with high interest in politics and news are more likely to support the ideals of impartiality, neutrality and giving equal time to all sides. For example, 79% of those highly interested in politics agreed that news outlets should offer a range of views so citizens can decide for themselves, compared to 71% among those with low political interest. People with a high interest in news (61%) agreed that news outlets should try to always be neutral, versus 55% of people with low interest in news; and 75% of heavy news consumers agreed that all sides should be given equal time on an issue, compared to 70% of light news consumers.

## SOCIAL MEDIA USERS ARE LESS SUPPORTIVE OF IMPARTIALITY, NEUTRALITY AND GIVING EQUAL TIME

Those who mainly get their news via social media platforms, are less supportive of each of the propositions related to impartiality in news. As **figure 2.8** shows, 69% of those who rely on social media as their main source of news agree that news outlets should reflect a range of views so that citizens can make up their own mind, compared to 80% of people who mainly get their news via print or radio.

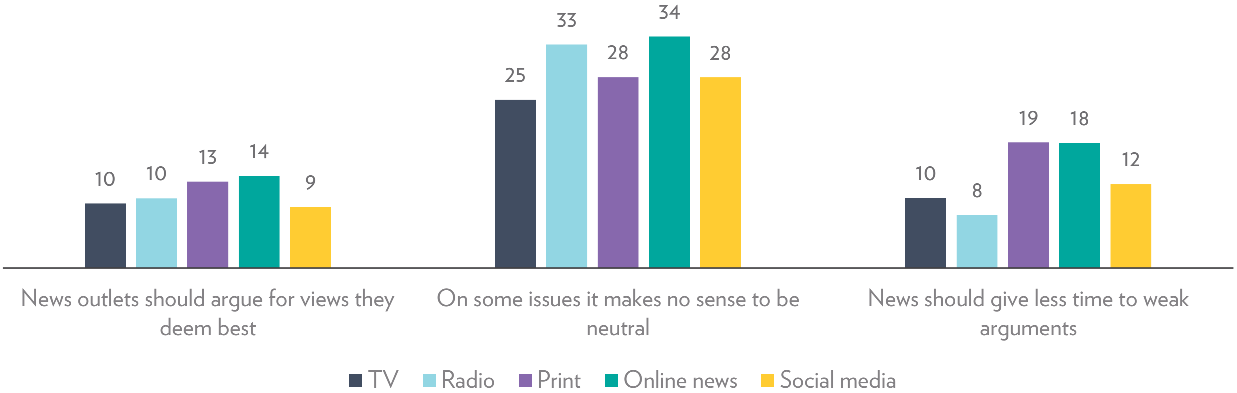
About half (51%) of Australian news consumers who use social media as their main source agree that news outlets should try to be neutral on all issues, compared to 69% of those who mainly use print news sources. When it comes to giving equal time to all sides of a story, two-thirds (65%) of participants who mainly use social media for news support this proposition, compared to 83% who mainly listen to radio news and 79% of consumers who mainly read print news. This is likely related to that fact that younger generations are more likely to rely on social media for news than older.

**FIGURE 2.8**. SUPPORT FOR IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS (%)




When it comes to propositions that support less impartiality and more advocacy on the part of news outlets, there is no real pattern (see **figure 2.9**). However, Australian news consumers who mainly use online news, are more supportive of the idea that there is no point being neutral on some issues (see **Chapter 8**).

**FIGURE 2.9**: SUPPORT FOR A LACK OF IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS (%)



## SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND IMPARTIALITY

When we look more closely at social media platforms specifically, Instagram users are the least supportive of the ideals of impartiality, neutrality, and equal time. Twitter users are most likely to agree that news outlets should present a range of views (77%), but Facebook and YouTube users are more likely to support the proposition that news outlets should be neutral on all issues (58% for both), and all sides should receive equal time (Facebook 71%; YouTube 70%) (see **figure 2.10**).

Those who access news via Facebook (29%) and YouTube (31%) are the least supportive of the idea that some issues should not be reported in a neutral manner, and Twitter news consumers are the most likely to support news outlets giving equal time to views they deem weak (see **figure 2.11**).

**FIGURE 2.10**: SUPPORT FOR IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY SOCIAL MEDIA NEWS USERS ON SELECTED PLATFORMS (%)

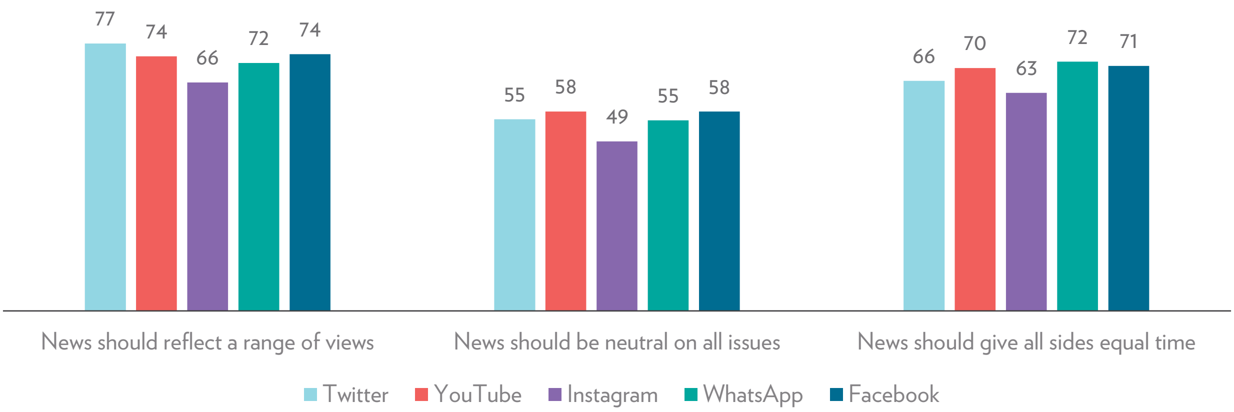
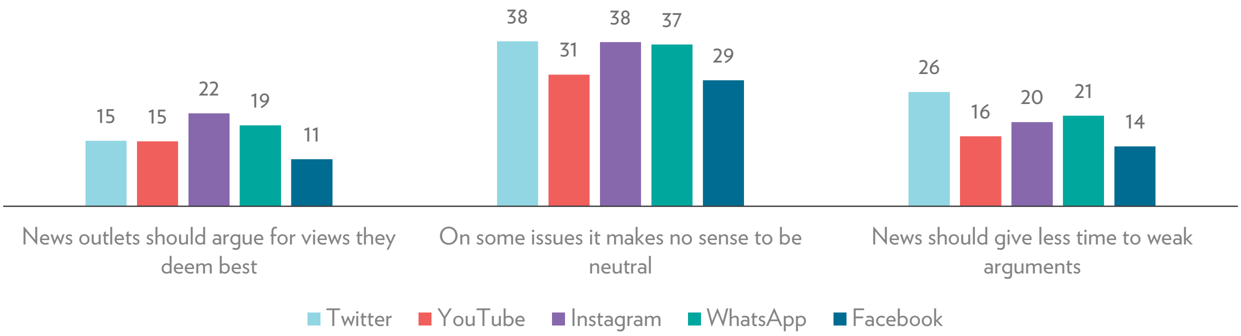



**FIGURE 2.11**: SUPPORT FOR A LACK OF IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY SOCIAL MEDIA NEWS USERS ON SELECTED PLATFORMS (%)

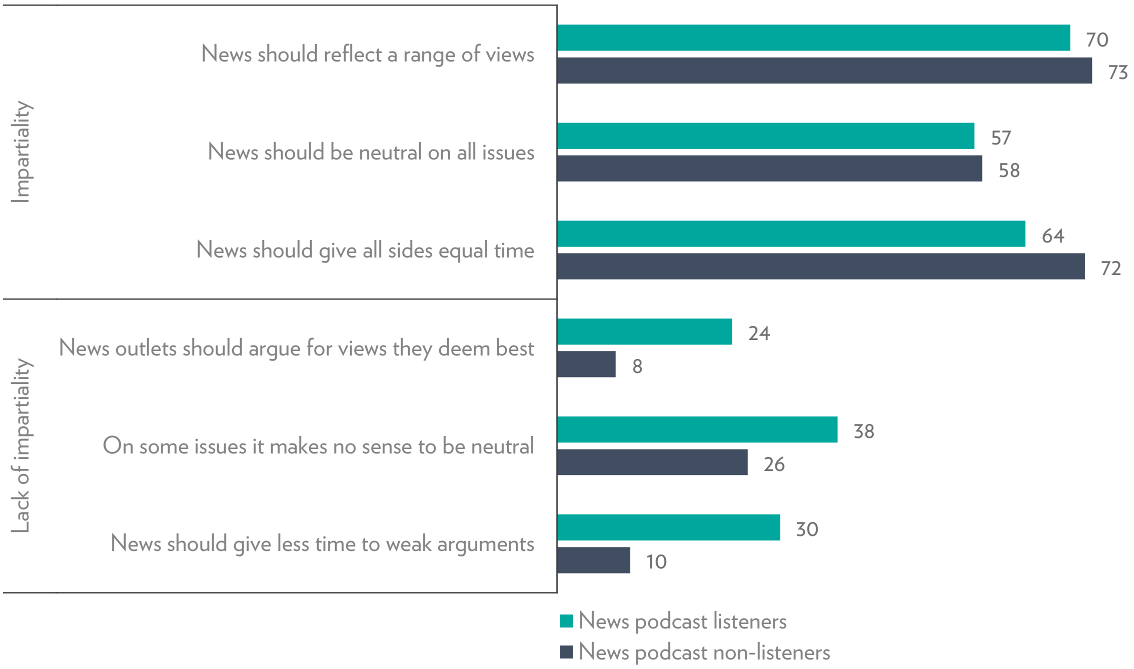



## NEWS PODCAST LISTENERS ARE LESS SUPPORTIVE OF IMPARTIALITY, NEUTRALITY AND GIVING EQUAL TIME

News podcast users are less inclined to agree with the propositions supporting traditional journalism values of impartiality, neutrality, and giving equal time (see **figure 2.12**). Instead, we find those who have listened to a podcast in the last month are more likely to think there are some issues where it makes no sense for news outlets to try and be neutral (38% vs 26% non-podcast users). They are also more likely to agree with the idea that news outlets should not give equal time to views they think are weaker (30% vs 10% podcast non-listeners). This supports research that indicates podcast listeners are seeking alternatives to traditional news formats, where the ideal of impartiality has historically dominated.[1]

[1] Sang, Y., Lee, J. & Park, S. (2020). *Podcast Trends and Issues in Australia and Beyond: Global Perspectives*. Canberra: News & Media Research Centre. https://apo.org.au/node/308947

**FIGURE 2.12**: SUPPORT FOR IMPARTIALITY AND A LACK OF IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY NEWS PODCAST USE (%)



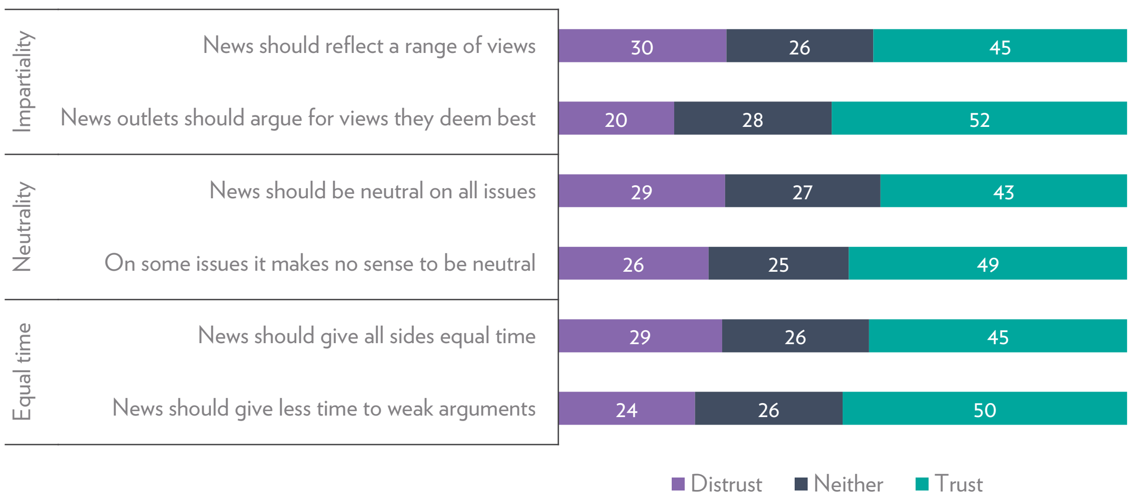

[Q11F_2018] A podcast is an episodic series of digital audio files, which you can download, subscribe or listen to. Which of the following types of podcast have you listened to in the last month. Please select all that apply. A podcast about news, politics, international events. [Base: News podcast listeners N=230; Non-listeners N=1,804].

## THOSE WHO SUPPORT NEWS HAVING AN OPINION ALSO HAVE HIGHER TRUST IN NEWS

The data suggest a relationship between support for ideals of journalism and trust. Consumers who support ideals of impartiality, neutrality and equal time being given to all sides express lower trust in news (**figure 2.13**). Among those who say they prefer news to be neutral on every issue (43%) also say they trust news generally, compared to 49% of those who say on some issues it makes no sense to be neutral. Those who say news organisations should argue for views they deem best are more likely to trust news (52%).

This might reflect that those who prefer partisan news are satisfied with what is offered and are consuming news brands that reflect their own viewpoint.

**FIGURE 2.13**: SUPPORT FOR IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY TRUST IN NEWS (%)




[Q6_2018_2] It is now possible to get online news in many different ways, including from search engines and social media sites. With this in mind, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. I think I can trust news in social media most of the time. Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree. [Base: Impartiality N=1,692; Neutrality N=1,729; Equal time N=1,699] *Excluded 'Don't know'.

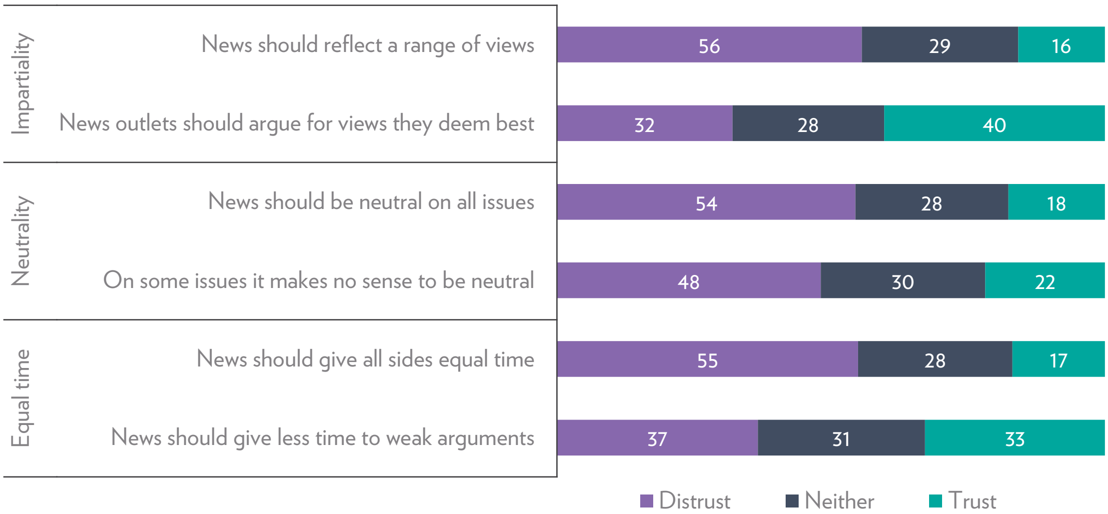
## THOSE WHO ARE MOST SUPPORTIVE OF IMPARTIALITY OF NEWS ARE MORE DISTRUSTING OF NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Perhaps unsurprisingly, news consumers who prefer impartiality are much more likely to say they distrust news on social media. Among those who say that news should reflect a range of views, 56% say they distrust news on social media, while those who say news outlets should argue for views they deem best, only 32% are distrustful. Similarly, those who say news should give equal time to all points of view (55%) are much more likely to distrust news on social media.

Those who prefer partisan news have much higher trust in news found on social media. Those who say news outlets should argue for views they deem best trust news on social media (40%) far more than those who want impartial news (16%).

The suggestion here is that those who prioritise impartiality may already view social media in a particularly negative light, while those committed to news organisations having a voice, or advocating for particular positions, might be more preferentially inclined towards social media news. These findings are reinforced by other research that identifies a strong presence of bias and agendas on social media as motivations for low trust.[2]

**FIGURE 2.14**: SUPPORT FOR IMPARTIALITY AND LACK OF IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY TRUST IN NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA (%)



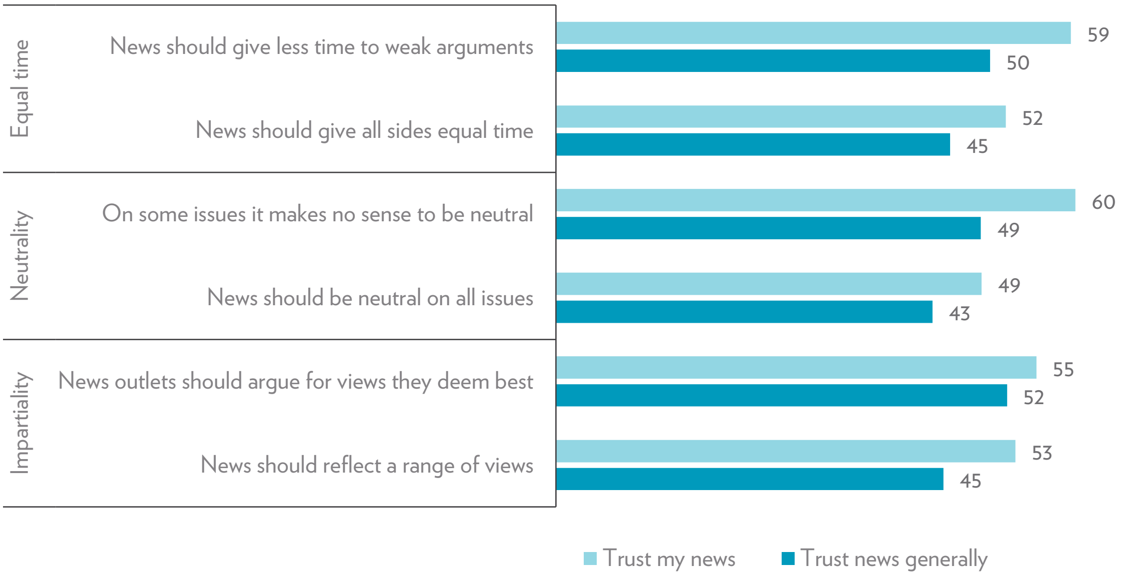

[Q6_2018_2] It is now possible to get online news in many different ways, including from search engines and social media sites. With this in mind, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. I think I can trust news in social media most of the time. Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree. [Base: Impartiality N=1,692; Neutrality N=1,729; Equal time N=1,699] *Excluded 'Don't know'.

## THOSE WHO PREFER NEWS THAT TAKES A POSITION ARE MORE TRUSTING OF THEIR NEWS

Those who disagree with traditional journalistic values of neutrality and giving equal time are more trusting of news generally and are much more trusting of the news they choose to consume. Among those who say there are issues where it makes no sense for the news to be neutral, 60% say they trust the news they use, compared to only 49% of those who say news should be neutral on all issues. This suggests that those who value news that takes a position are less sceptical of news generally, and place above average trust in the sources of news they seek out themselves (see **figure 2.15**).

[2] Newman, N. & Fletcher, R. (2017). *Bias, bullshit and lies: Audience perspectives on low trust in the media.* Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford.

**FIGURE 2.15**: SUPPORT FOR IMPARTIALITY AND LACK OF IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS BY TRUST IN NEWS GENERALLY AND MY NEWS (%)




## SUMMARY

The 2021 data show strong support for traditional values of impartiality, balance, and neutrality in journalism, with 73% agreeing news should present a range of views so citizens can make up their own mind; 71% thinking all sides of an issue should be given equal time; and 57% agreeing that news should always be neutral. This is not surprising, following the findings in the *Digital News Report: Australia 2020*.

In last year's survey, news consumers were asked if they preferred to get news from sources without a point of view (54%), that share the news consumer's point of view (19%), or challenged their worldview (13%). More than half said they favoured news from impartial sources that did not advocate one view over another.

While the ideal of objectivity has long been debated in journalism, the data reveal a strong desire for news outlets to attempt fairness, balance, and an impartial approach to reporting.

However, both the 2020 and 2021 data highlight that these traditional journalism ideals are more strongly supported by older generations and those who use traditional sources of news, than younger generations, and those who mainly use digital platforms to get their news.

In an online environment, there is a blurring between journalism and other forms of narrative content produced by a range of outlets including advocacy groups, politicians, alternative, and partisan media. In this environment, younger consumers are exposed to information content that mimics the narrative style of journalism, but espouses strong opinion and advocacy.

Despite this, the DNR: Australia, and other research[3], clearly show that perceptions of bias, political and commercial interests also erode perceptions of trust in news. These are contradictory messages for news outlets and policy makers as the news media continues to straddle online and offline multigenerational audiences.

[3] ACMA (2020) *Attitudes to news today: Impartiality and commercial influence*; RISJ (2021) *Listening to what trust in news means to users: qualitative evidence from four countries* https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/listening-what-trust-news-means-users-qualitative-evidence-four-countries?s=09#sub3

# COMMENTARY

## BUSHFIRES AND COVID-19 SHOW AUSTRALIAN AUDIENCES WILL REWARD FAIR AND BALANCED JOURNALISM

**Amanda Meade**, Media correspondent, *Guardian Australia*

One newspaper's decision in May 2021 to name a NSW man who visited numerous barbecue shops in Sydney while infected with COVID-19 drew the ire of government[1] because it was out of the ordinary.

The media, while keeping a critical eye on authorities, has in the main co-operated with governments in their efforts to keep the community safe during COVID-19. Naming someone who has been open about their movements, and helped contact tracers, might make people less likely to come forward. It was a decision which put lives at risk and the public expect media to be responsible as well as balanced and fair.

Although the global trend is towards a polarised news landscape as people find their 'tribe' online, the majority of consumers still want news which is impartial, neutral, and balanced. As the 2021 data shows: 73% agree news should present a range of views so citizens can make up their own mind.

There is still strong support for the traditional values of journalism and the vast majority — 71% — think all sides of an issue should be given equal time and a majority — 57% — agree that news should always be neutral.

In 2020-21 the media turned up every day to listen and report on the latest COVID-19 statistics from state and federal governments and the public lapped it up. Victorian premier Dan Andrews' press conferences became appointment viewing. Audiences for news went up during the pandemic. Audiences for news outlets with a reputation for trustworthiness went up even more. Indeed, history has shown media consumption from trusted news outlets spikes during a crisis, and we saw it in Australia with the bushfires and COVID-19.

Last year the global pandemic saw a spike in traffic to news websites[2], with Guardian Australia experiencing the biggest surge in the Australian market, according to Nielsen data[3]. In one month alone, ABC News rose from 9.9 million in February 2020 to 15 million unique readers in March on the back of the pandemic. And once ABC News reached number one of the top 10 Australian digital news websites, toppling the popular commercial outlet news.com.au, it stayed there[4].

**When it comes to the ABC's role during the bushfires, the importance of reliable information meant the difference between life and death.**

The bushfire royal commission was told 60% of people in bushfire-affected areas said information from the ABC helped ensure their safety[5]. This aligns with the findings of the survey that "regional consumers were more likely to support the idea that news outlets should be neutral in reporting on all issues (61%) compared to 55% who live in city areas". It may also reflect the older demographic in regional areas, as well as the ABC's older audience profile.

The ABC prides itself on providing balanced, objective journalism and is largely trusted by the Australian public to provide just that, despite critics from conservative media who claim it is biased and left-wing. Its editorial standards demand that the "presentation of news and information is impartial", unlike a tabloid outlet which takes a position on an issue and presents it boldly.

Because of this, the ABC outperforms the commercial media when it comes to perceptions of fairness and balance, with 77% of Australians saying they believe that the ABC does a 'good job' covering country and regional issues compared with 61% for commercial media, according to the ABC annual report.

In March 2020, 84% of Australians surveyed[6] agreed ABC News "is a valuable source of news to the Australian community" and 72% agreed it is "Australia's most trusted source of news and current affairs".

Whatever the shortfalls of journalism, especially in its fragmented state, the data reveals the public crave fairness and balance. They want news outlets to be impartial and they reward those who are.

[1] https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/ftUACK1qPXu8OR0IFMIMsp?domain=theguardian.com
[2] https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/GzsPCL7rQ6FNKz5AcqUKJ_?domain=theguardian.com
[3] https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/F03QCMwvRDUxXnGgIJgUHs?domain=theguardian.com
[4] https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/LDR6CNLwVDTV7g1AIRsgsf?domain=mumbrella.com.au
[5] https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/y9-vCOMxWIU5nBoJhPxTyO?domain=theguardian.com
[6] https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/VZHSCP7y0mFvWLqOIrqVvX?domain=about.abc.net.au


**NEWS MOMENTS**

June 13, 2020 | Thousands in Sydney marched in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, defying a court order and in breach of state COVID-19 restrictions. Protestors called for government action on deaths in police custody and an end to systemic racism in Australia.

IMAGE: RICHARD WAINWRIGHT / AAP IMAGE

# 3 NEWS REPRESENTATION

- More than half of Australians think the news media represent their views and community sufficiently and fairly.
- A quarter of Gen Z women (26%) think they are under-represented in the news compared to 11% of Gen Z men.
- Regional news consumers are more likely to feel the coverage of their communities is insufficient and unfair.
- Those on low incomes are more likely to say there is not enough news coverage of their social and economic class (23%) and that it is unfair (30%).
- Perceptions of sufficient and fair coverage, particularly of political views, are associated with trust in news.

# AMOUNT OF COVERAGE IN THE NEWS

## MOST AUSTRALIANS ARE SATISFIED WITH THE AMOUNT OF NEWS COVERAGE OF PEOPLE LIKE THEM

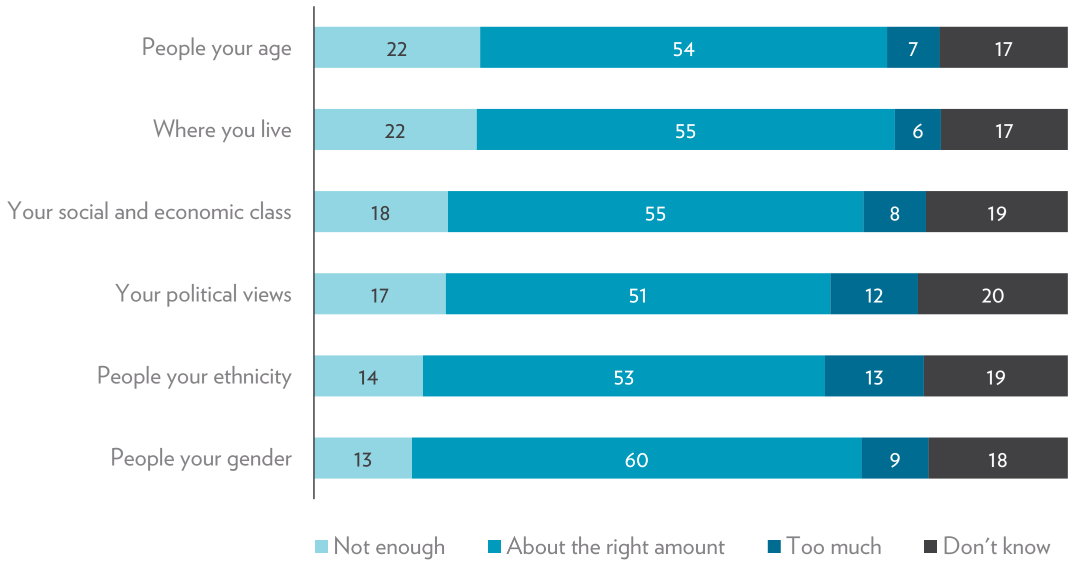
This year the survey included questions about the amount and fairness of news coverage. We asked consumers about their views on the news media's coverage of their gender, age group, where they live, social and economic class, ethnicity, and political views.

Most Australians appear to be satisfied with the amount of news coverage of people like them, or who share their views. Overall, 60% of Australians say their gender receives the right amount of coverage, but only half say their political views do (51%) (see **figure 3.1**). More than half say the place they live in receives about the right amount of news coverage (55%). The same proportion say there is the right amount of coverage of their social and economic class. Just over half of consumers are satisfied with the amount of news coverage of their age and ethnicity.

More than one-fifth (22%) of Australians think there is not enough coverage of people their age, and an equal proportion say there is not enough coverage of where they live.

Only a small number of Australians say people like themselves receive 'too much' coverage. Perception of too much coverage is highest about people who share their ethnicity (13%) followed by political views (12%), gender (9%), socioeconomic class (8%), age (7%), and region (6%). In all categories, there was a large proportion of people saying they don't know (17% to 20%).

**FIGURE 3.1**: VIEWS ABOUT THE AMOUNT OF NEWS COVERAGE (%)




[Div1_2021] Thinking about the news in general in your country, do you think that there is too much, about the right amount, or not enough news coverage of each of the following? [Base: N=2,034]

## GEN Z AND REGIONAL CONSUMERS THINK THEY ARE UNDER-REPRESENTED

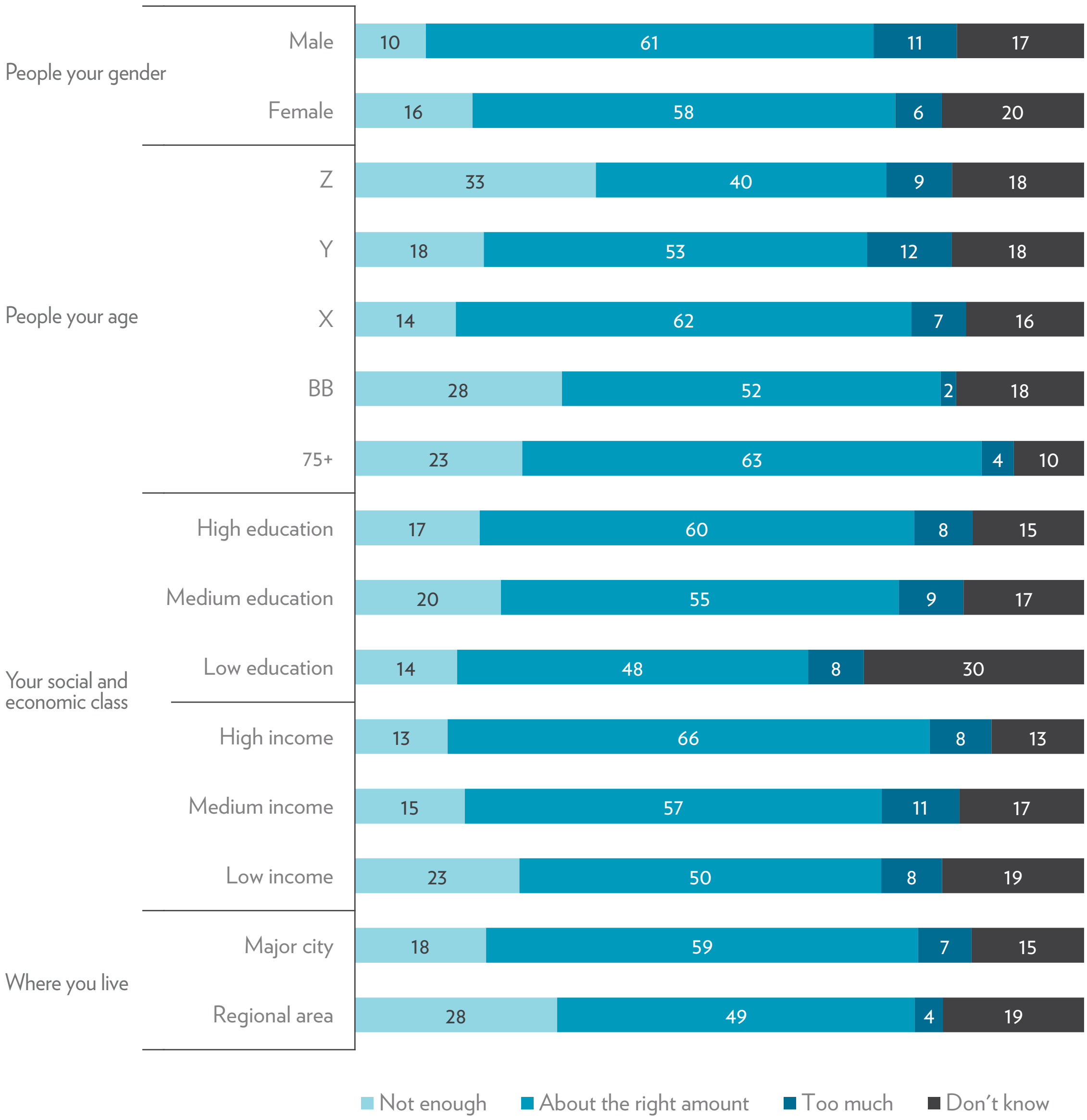
Women are more likely to feel there is not enough news coverage of their gender (16%) than men (10%). Men (11%) are more likely than women (6%) to say there is too much.

There is a large gap between different generations in their perception of news coverage. Gen Z is more likely to think there is not enough coverage of people their age (33%) than other generations. Baby Boomers are the next most likely to say they are under-represented in the news (28%) (see **figure 3.2**).

Low income earners are much more likely to think there is not enough news coverage of their social and economic class (23%), than people with medium (15%) or high incomes (13%). Medium (55%) and highly educated participants (60%) are more likely to think their social and economic class receives the right amount of media coverage, than people with low levels of education (48%). A large proportion of those with low education (30%) say they don't know.

Regional consumers are also more likely to feel people in their communities are under-represented in news coverage (28%) than city dwellers (18%).

**FIGURE 3.2**: VIEWS ABOUT THE AMOUNT OF NEWS COVERAGE BY DEMOGRAPHICS (%)

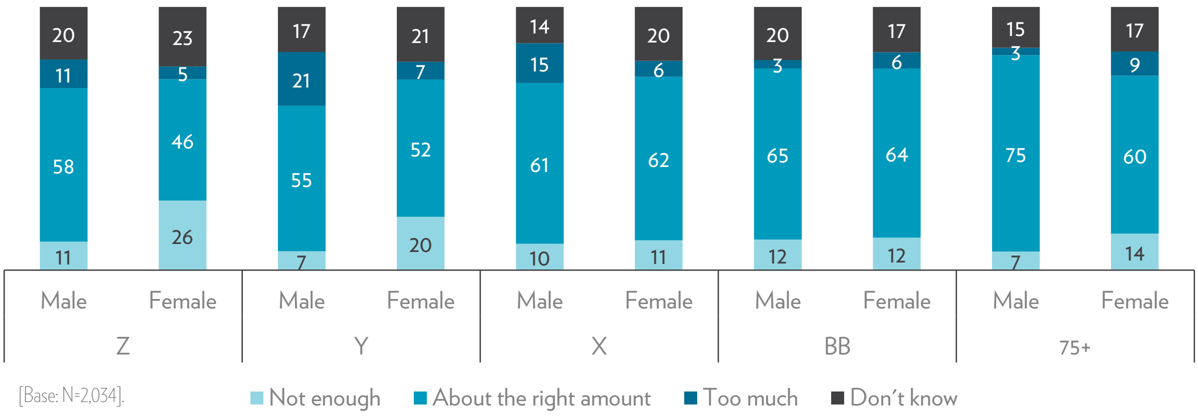



[Base: N=2,034].

## YOUNG WOMEN, IN PARTICULAR, FEEL THEY DON'T GET ENOUGH NEWS COVERAGE

Women are more likely than men to believe there is not enough news coverage of their gender. **Figure 3.3** shows this is particularly true for Gen Z women. These young women (26%) are more than twice as likely as their male counterparts (11%) to feel there is not enough coverage of their gender. This is higher than any other age groups.

**FIGURE 3.3**: VIEWS ABOUT THE AMOUNT OF COVERAGE OF PEOPLE YOUR GENDER BY GENERATION (%)

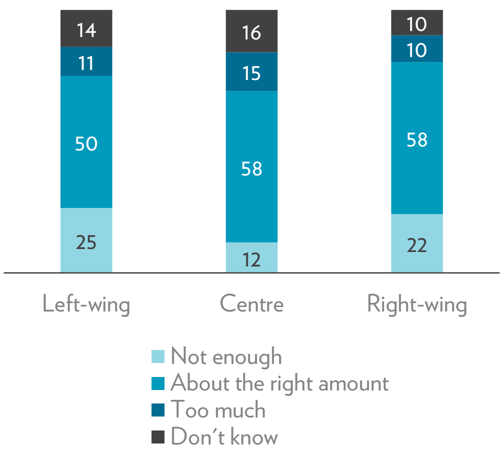



[Base: N=2,034].

## LEFT-WING FEEL THEIR POLITICAL VIEWS ARE UNDER-REPRESENTED IN THE NEWS

In terms of political views, left-wing news consumers are less likely to think their views receive sufficient coverage (50%), than centre (58%), and right-wing (58%) audiences. Left-wing audiences are also slightly more likely (25%) than right-wing (22%), and centre (12%) to think there is not enough coverage of their political views (see **figure 3.4**).

**FIGURE 3.4**: VIEWS ABOUT THE AMOUNT OF NEWS COVERAGE OF PEOPLE WITH YOUR POLITICAL VIEWS BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION (%)

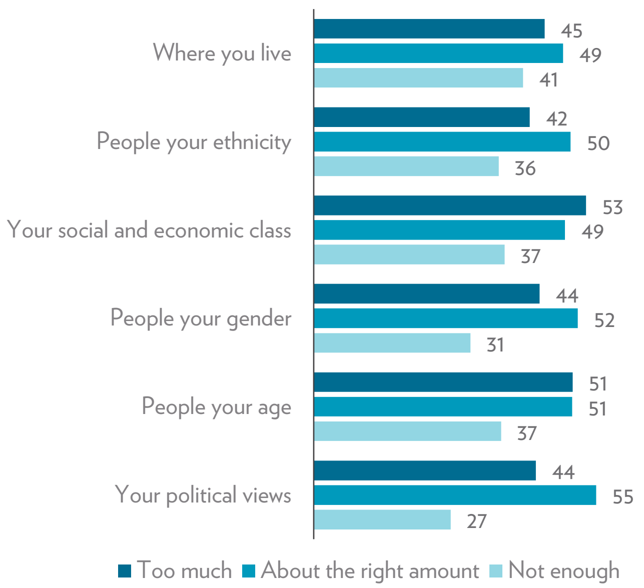



[Q1F] Some people talk about 'left', 'right' and 'centre' to describe parties and politicians. (Generally, socialist parties would be considered 'left wing' whilst conservative parties would be considered 'right wing'). With this in mind, where would you place yourself on the following scale? Very left-wing; Fairly left-wing; Slightly left-of-centre; Centre; Slightly right-of-centre; Fairly right-wing; Very right-wing; Don't know. [Base: N=2,034]

## VIEWS ABOUT MEDIA REPRESENTATION ARE ASSOCIATED WITH TRUST IN NEWS

Perception about sufficient news coverage is associated with trust in news. Those who feel there is not enough news coverage of groups they belong to, are less likely to trust news in general (see **figure 3.5**). In contrast, those who are satisfied with the amount of news coverage, especially regarding their political views, are more likely to trust news. Fifty-five percent of those who are satisfied with the amount of news coverage of their political views say they trust news compared to only 27% of those who say there is not enough.

**FIGURE 3.5**: TRUST IN NEWS BY VIEWS ABOUT THE AMOUNT OF NEWS COVERAGE (%)



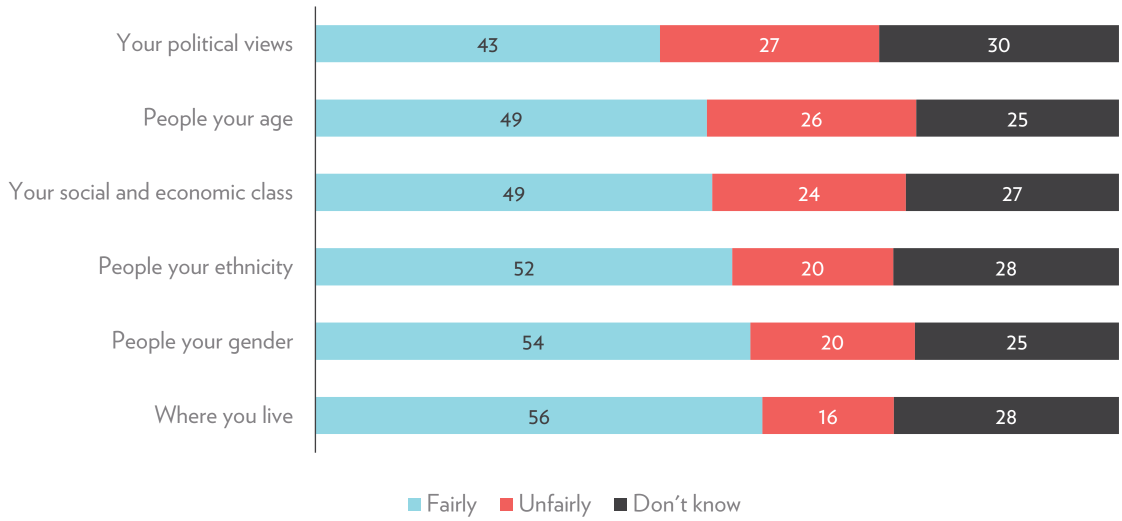

[6_2016_1] We are now going to ask you about trust in the news. First we will ask you about how much you trust the news as a whole within your country. Then we will ask you about how much you trust the news that you choose to consume. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: I think you can trust most news most of the time. Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree. [Base: N=2,034]

# FAIRNESS OF NEWS COVERAGE

## PEOPLE FEEL MOST STRONGLY ABOUT FAIR COVERAGE OF THEIR POLITICAL VIEWS

More than half of Australians say news provides fair coverage of their region, gender, and ethnicity (see **figure 3.6**). People feel more strongly about their political views being unfairly covered in the news. Australians are less likely to think news coverage of people who share their political views is fair (43%). In contrast, more than half believe their geographic location (56%) and their gender (54%) are covered fairly. A large percentage say they 'don't know' if news coverage of people like them is fair or not, suggesting low media literacy and engagement.

**FIGURE 3.6**: VIEWS ABOUT THE FAIRNESS OF COVERAGE (%)

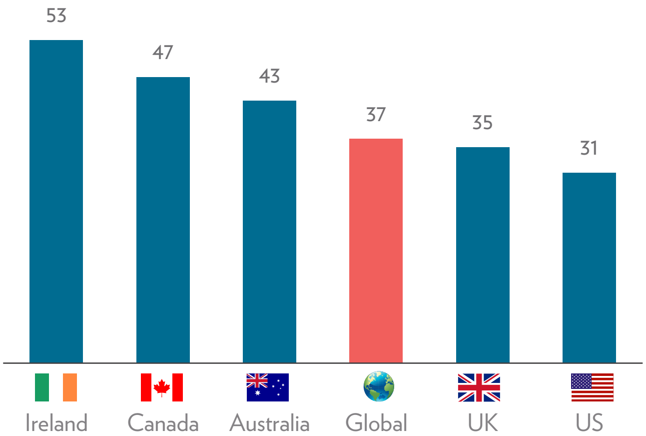



[Div2_2021] Thinking about the news in general in your country, do you think that news organisations in your country cover each of the following fairly or unfairly? [Base: N=2,034]

## AUSTRALIANS ARE MORE LIKELY TO SAY THEIR POLITICAL VIEWS ARE REPRESENTED FAIRLY IN THE NEWS, THAN AUDIENCES IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Compared to global consumers, Australians are more likely to believe their political views are represented fairly in the news. Globally, 37% think the news media represent their political views fairly. In contrast, 43% of Australians are satisfied with the news coverage given to their political views (see **figure 3.7**).

**FIGURE 3.7**: NEWS COVERS MY POLITICAL VIEWS FAIRLY IN SELECT COUNTRIES (%)

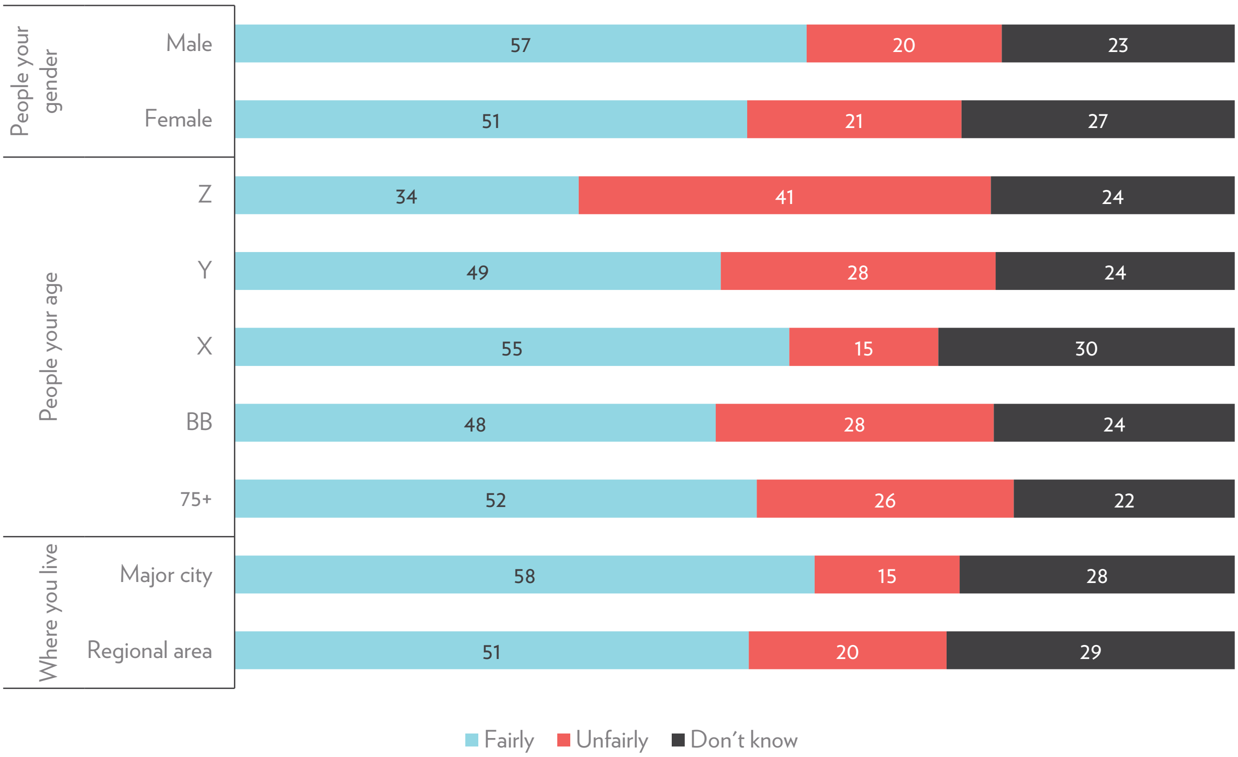



*Global average of 33 countries. [Base=Ireland (2,031), Canada (2,036), Australia (2,034), UK (2,039), US (2,001)]

## GEN Z THINK NEWS MEDIA UNFAIRLY REPRESENT THEIR GENERATION

In addition to Gen Z participants believing there is not enough coverage of their generation in the news, they are also the most likely to feel the news media represents their age group unfairly (41%). People in regional areas (20%) are more likely than city dwellers (15%) to think news coverage of their communities is unfair. Women (51%) are less likely to be satisfied than men (57%) with news coverage of their gender (see **figure 3.8**).

**FIGURE 3.8**: VIEWS ABOUT THE FAIRNESS OF COVERAGE BY DEMOGRAPHICS (%)



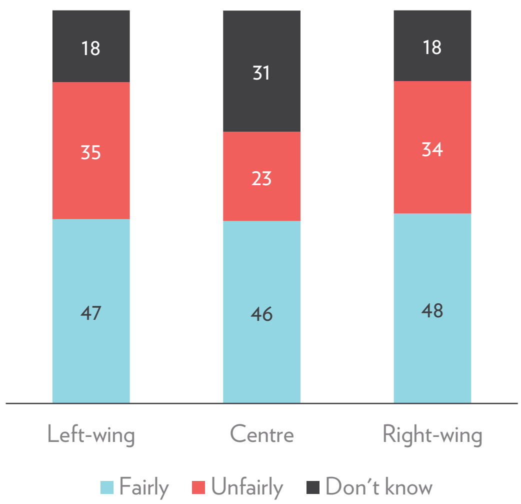

[Base: N=2,034].

## LEFT AND RIGHT-WING NEWS CONSUMERS BOTH FEEL NEWS COVERAGE IS UNFAIR

Both left-wing (35%) and right-wing (34%) news consumers are far more likely than centre oriented participants (23%) to think that news coverage of their political views is unfair (see **figure 3.9**).

More than **1 in 3** left-wing and right-wing Australians say their *political views* are **unfairly** represented

**FIGURE 3.9**: VIEWS ABOUT THE FAIRNESS OF COVERAGE OF PEOPLE WITH YOUR POLITICAL VIEWS BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION (%)

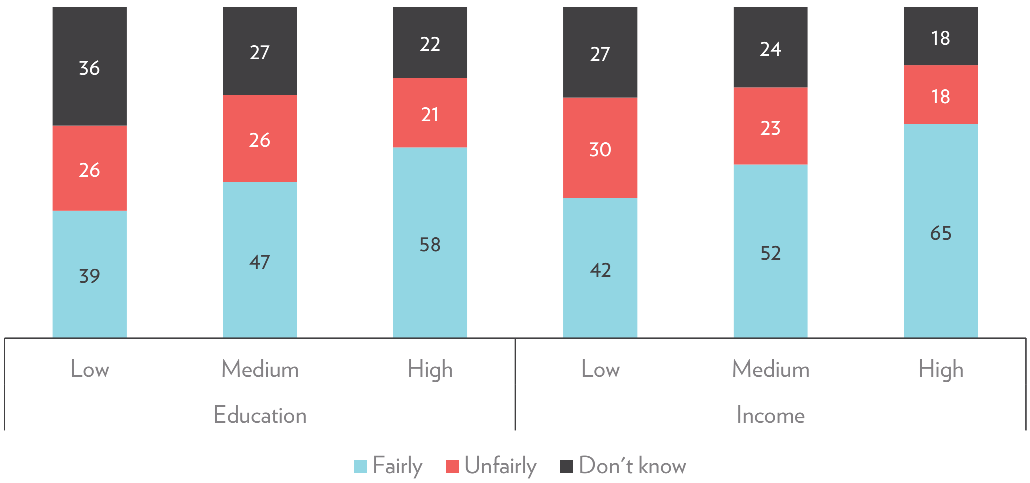



[Base: N=2,034]

## AUSTRALIANS WITH LOW INCOME AND EDUCATION BELIEVE NEWS COVERAGE OF THEIR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CLASS IS UNFAIR

There is a strong divide across socio-economic groups in perceptions of fairness. Those with high income (65%) and education levels (58%) are the most likely to say news coverage of their social and economic class is fair. In contrast, 42% of low income earners and 39% of those with low education agree that news coverage of their social and economic class is fair (see **figure 3.10**). People with high education and incomes are the most likely to be satisfied with the quality and quantity of coverage of their social and economic class.

**FIGURE 3.10**: VIEWS ABOUT THE FAIRNESS OF COVERAGE OF PEOPLE YOUR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CLASS BY INCOME AND EDUCATION (%)

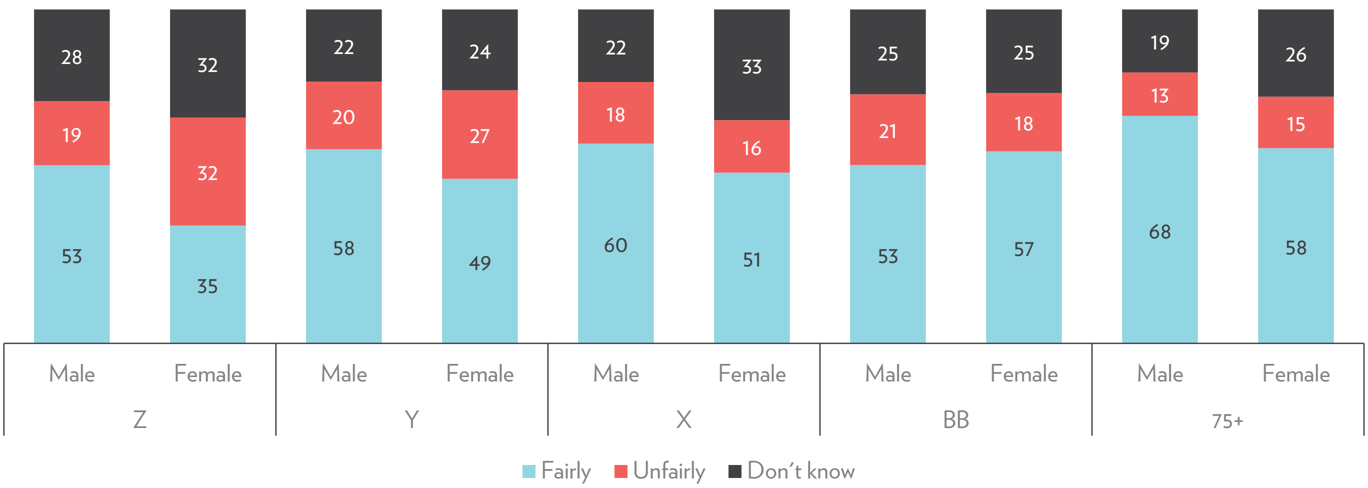



[Base: N=2,034].

## GEN Z WOMEN ARE THE MOST DISSATISFIED WITH FAIRNESS OF NEWS COVERAGE

In addition to believing they do not get enough news coverage, women are also more likely than men to think news coverage of their gender is unfair. Again, this is particularly true for Gen Z women (32%) who are much more likely than Gen Z men (19%) to think coverage of their cohort is unfair (see **figure 3.11**). Baby Boomer women are the exception with 57% saying news coverage of their gender is fair, compared to 53% of Baby Boomer men. Men aged 75+ are the most likely to think their gender is represented fairly in the news (68%).

**FIGURE 3.11**: VIEWS ABOUT THE FAIRNESS OF COVERAGE OF PEOPLE YOUR GENDER BY GENERATION (%)

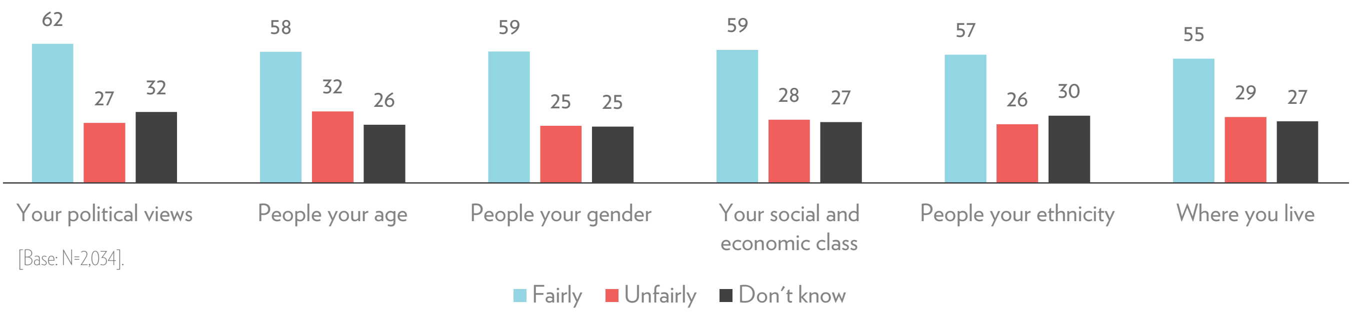



[Base: N=2,034].

## PERCEPTIONS OF FAIRNESS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH TRUST IN NEWS

There is a strong association between the perception of fairness of news coverage and general trust in news. Those who feel the news media report fairly about 'people like them' are much more likely to trust news (see **figure 3.12**). This connection is strongest in relation to news coverage of political views. The majority of those who feel news reporting of their political views is fair also say they trust the news (62%), compared to 27% of those who think news coverage of their political views is unfair.

**FIGURE 3.12**: TRUST IN NEWS BY VIEWS ABOUT THE FAIRNESS OF COVERAGE (%)




[Base: N=2,034].

## SUMMARY

Overall, more than half of Australians are satisfied with how the news media represent 'people like them'. However, certain groups feel they are more under-represented than others, revealing a perceived lack of diversity in news coverage. Women, younger generations, low socio-economic, and regional Australians particularly feel they are under-represented and unfairly covered in the news.

The data show, Australian women are more likely to believe there is not enough coverage of their gender in the news compared to men, and that it is unfair. This is most strongly felt by Gen Z women. In the context of larger community conversations about gender equality these findings are important. They point to the need for diversity in news coverage, not only in the topics covered, but also in the voices being heard. These findings support a push for greater inclusion and diversity in news content and in the newsroom. These perceptions of unfairness and insufficiency are also linked to assessments of trust in news.

Those who feel there is enough news coverage of people like them and that the news covers them fairly, are more likely to trust in news in general. This is particularly true in relation to the coverage of political views. Both right and left-wing Australians are equally dissatisfied with the amount and fairness of news coverage of their political views. While this may provide some comfort to journalists who try to offer balance in their reporting, it highlights the importance of fair and sufficient coverage of different segments of the community in building trust with audiences.

Importantly, a large proportion of Australians say they don't know if the amount of media coverage of 'people like them' is sufficient or fair. Those who have low education are much more likely to say they don't know. This indicates a lack of engagement and adequate media literacy to identify misrepresentation and bias in the news. Combined with a lack of awareness about misinformation, lower interest in and consumption of news, these findings confirm the ongoing need for targeted media literacy interventions for this cohort.

# COMMENTARY

## MEDIA LITERACY AND NEWS MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS

**Annabel Astbury | Michael Dezuanni | Tanya Notley**
Australian Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA)

Increasing the ability of citizens to use, analyse, critique and create all forms of media — including news media — is the key aim of the Australian Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA). We seek to achieve this by creating a national vision for media literacy and by supporting a national network with information, resources, training, and research.

One key pillar of media literacy supports people to analyse how people, places, ideas and groups are represented in media. As British media scholar David Buckingham puts it: "the media do not offer us a transparent 'window on the world', but a mediated version of it. They don't just present reality: they re-present it."[1]

Making news stories involves re-presenting reality. Incidents, events and ideas are selected, arguments are constructed, and particular people — witnesses, experts, authorities and affected citizens — are chosen to tell news stories. Given this highly selective process, perhaps it is no surprise that researchers and citizens sometimes identify how particular social groups are being ignored or misrepresented.

A 2019 snapshot study of Australian news media examined the inclusion and representation of young people in the news by analysing a sample of national, state and regional news media on an 'unremarkable' day in the news cycle[2].

The study found that young people under 18 years are seldom given the opportunity to speak for themselves in the news. When they did appear, the most common focus for these stories related to accidents and social welfare — they were never or very rarely represented in stories about the economy, politics, environment and climate change. Too often, the study found, young people appeared in news stories only as victims or family members; or they were spoken about, but not listened to.

These findings were supported by a subsequent study by the Foundation for Young Australians which examined how young people were represented by Australian news media during the first six months of the COVID-19 Pandemic[3]. The study found that not only were young people's voices largely absent from news media during this period, Generations Z and Y were often stereotyped — characterised, for example, as dangerous or criminal, lazy, or lacking resilience. The study found that some news media organisations were far more likely to rely on these stereotypes in their reporting. Given the findings of these two studies, it is no surprise to us that the Digital News Report study has identified that:

**The youngest adults — Gen Z — are far more likely to perceive unfair bias in the way news media represent them.**

While it is insightful that Australians on a low income or living in a regional area are more likely to be dissatisfied with the way they are included and represented in news coverage, we were very surprised to find an overall lack of perception of bias by women, based on previous studies.

The *Who Makes the News* global study analyses one day in the news to examine how women are included and represented in news media[4]. The study has been repeated every five years since 1995, most recently in 120 countries. While the findings show incremental improvements over that period in some areas, in almost all countries, including Australia, women remain very under-represented as news sources[5].

Yet in this Australian Digital News survey, it is only Gen Z females who are more likely to consider people of their gender to be treated unfairly by news media.

The reason for this disparity between the under representation of women in the news media, and this study's finding about most women's perception of fairness is unclear, and points to the need for further research.

[1] Buckingham, D. (2019), The Media Literacy Manifesto, John Wiley & Sons.
[2] Notley, T., Dezuanni, M. & Zhong, H.F (2019), *The inclusion and representation of young people in the Australian news media*, Research report, Western Sydney University and Queensland University of Technology.
[3] Foundation for Young Australians (2020), *Missing: Young People in Australian News Media*, Research Report.
[4] See https://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp-reports/gmmp-2020-reports/
[5] Romano, A. (2021) *Who Makes the News?* Global Media Monitoring Project 2020: Australia National Report. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology and Toronto: WACC.

News media provide an important lens through which we see ourselves, our nation, our shared priorities and concerns.

**It is therefore important that citizens are able to see themselves — and the issues and events that most affect them — reflected fairly in news media.**

For this reason, it is vital that we have comprehensive studies of news media to allow us to see and understand what we otherwise would not be able to. This research can help news media organisations consider how they need to respond, while it can also inform media literacy efforts.

Research evidence of the kind presented in this report is therefore crucial to Australian Media Literacy Alliance's efforts in supporting media literacy in Australia and we value and appreciate their inclusion for the first time in this annual survey.

**NEWS MOMENTS**

March 3, 2020. Australian Associated Press announced it would be closing its news-wire business in June after 85-years of service. Though it was rescued from closure in June by a philanthropist led buy-out, 85 to 90 staff were let go.

IMAGE: MICK TSIKAS / AAP IMAGE

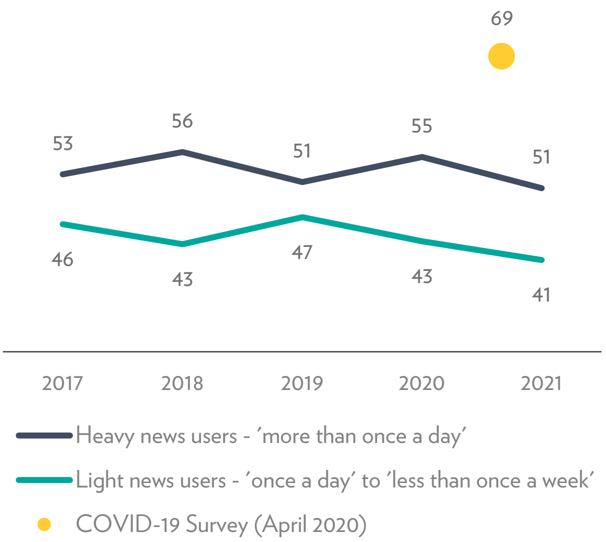
# 4 NEWS ACCESS

- Heavy news consumption has fallen from the COVID-19 high of 69% to 51% in 2021.
- Interest in the news continues to decline, with high interest falling to 52% (-8).
- Social media is now the main source of news for 54% of Gen Z (+6).
- 10% of 75+ use social media as the main source of news, a figure that has tripled since 2019.
- Mobile phones are the main device for online news for almost half of Australians (45%).

## NEWS CONSUMPTION FALLS FROM COVID-19 HIGH

In 2021, half of online Australians accessed news more than once a day (51%). This is a 4% decrease from last year (see **figure 4.1**). During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a steep rise in the level of news consumption (69%), but now it has reverted to the pre-COVID level (51%).

**FIGURE 4.1**: FREQUENCY OF NEWS ACCESS (%)[1]




[Q1b_NEW] Typically, how often do you access news? By news we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper or online). The percentage does not add to 100 as the figure does not include those who replied 'less often than once a month', 'never' and 'don't know' to this question. [Base: N=1,862] [April 2020] Q1. On average, how often do you access news? By news we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper or online) [Base: N=2,196]. This year we included all respondents in this figure including extremely low and non news consumers (N=130). In previous years, the number of non-users who were screened out was between 9% to 11%. This has been reduced to 6%, which may be due to COVID-19 and a slight increase in news consumption. To be comparable across the years, we excluded extremely low/non news consumers in this figure.

Men and older news consumers are more likely to be heavy news consumers than women and younger people. This trend has remained unchanged over the last two years. Those with higher education, income, or who live in the city are more likely to be heavy news consumers than people from lower socioe-conomic backgrounds or living in regional areas (**see figure 4.2**).

The decrease in news consumption was not uniform across all generations. In fact, Gen Z (+2) and 75+ (+3) experienced a minor increase, whereas for all other generations news access decreased (see **figure 4.3**).

**FIGURE 4.3**: HEAVY NEWS CONSUMPTION BY GENERATION (%)

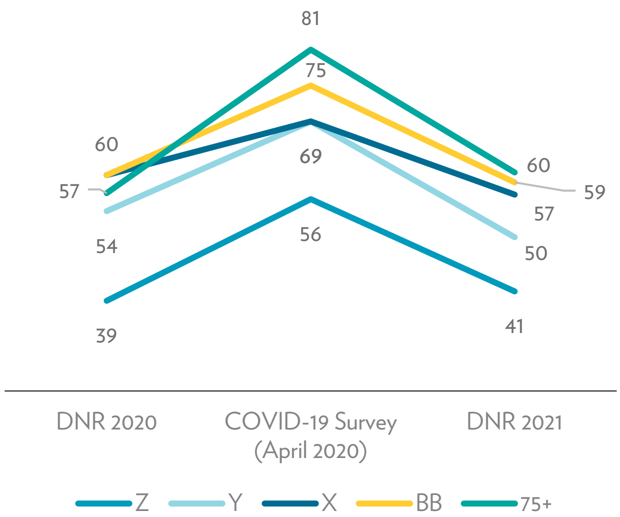
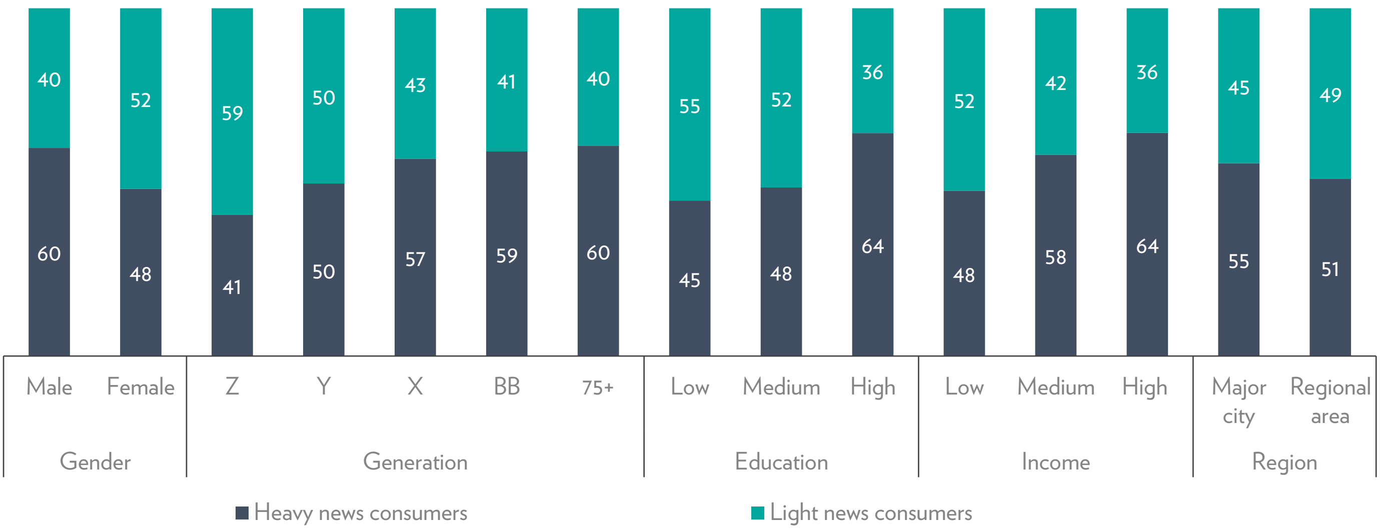



**FIGURE 4.2**: NEWS ACCESS BY DEMOGRAPHICS (%)



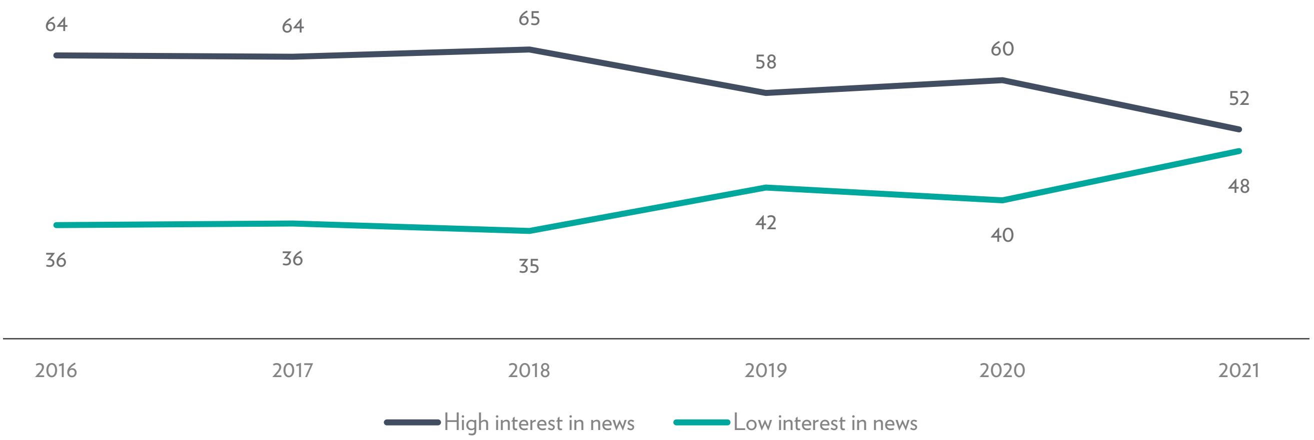

*This figure is based on news consumers only. Excluded non-users and those who 'Don't know'. [Base: N=1,915].

[1] All April 2020 figures in this report are based on a research conducted by the News & Media Research Centre during the COVID-19 pandemic (Park, S., Fisher, C., Lee, J. & McGuinness, K. (2020). *COVID-19: Australian news and misinformation*. Canberra: News & Media Research Centre. https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-07/apo-nid306728.pdf

## INTEREST IN NEWS CONTINUES TO DECLINE

Interest in news continues to fall among Australian news consumers. There was a 13 percentage point decrease in consumers who say they are highly interested in news from 2018 (see **figure 4.4**). Male and older consumers are more likely to be interested in news, along with city dwellers and those with higher education and income.

**FIGURE 4.4**: INTEREST IN NEWS 2016–2021 (%)

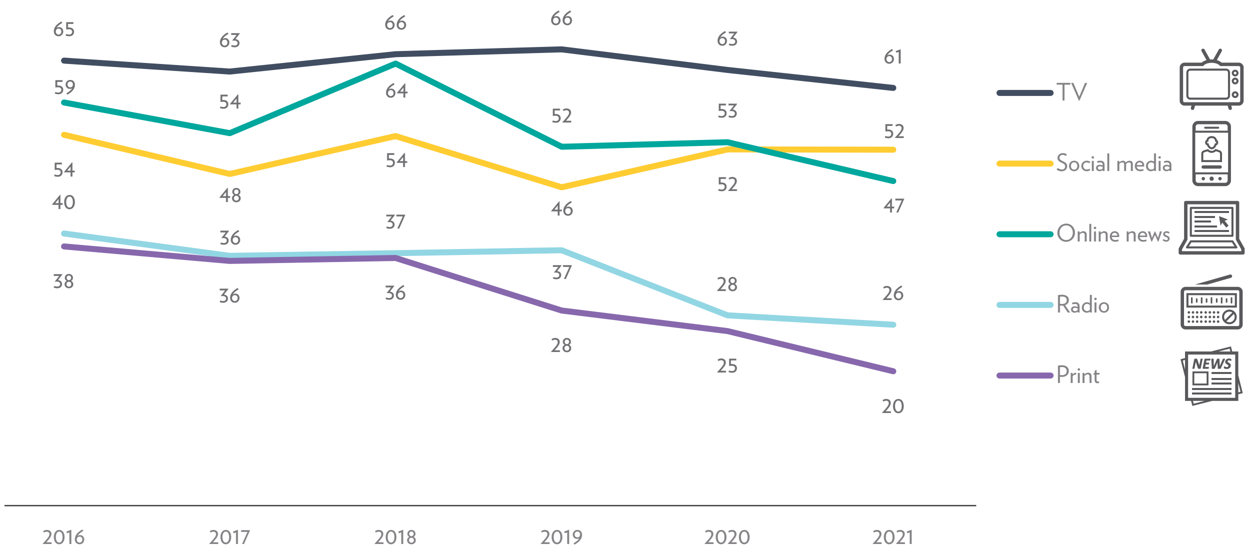



[Q1c] How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news? Extremely interested; Very interested; Somewhat interested; Not very interested; Not at all interested. Excludes 'Don't know'. [Base: N=2,017]. 'High interest' includes those who say they are 'extremely' and 'very interested' in news. 'Low interest' includes those who say they are 'somewhat', 'not very' or 'not at all' interested in news.

## GENERAL CONSUMPTION OF TRADITIONAL NEWS SOURCES CONTINUES TO DECLINE

TV remains the most popular general source of news but there has been a gradual decrease in its use over the last few years, along with print, radio, and online. The percentage of Australians using print and radio as general sources of news has significantly decreased since 2016 (Print: -18, Radio: -14) (see **figure 4.5**).

**FIGURE 4.5**: GENERAL SOURCE OF NEWS (%)

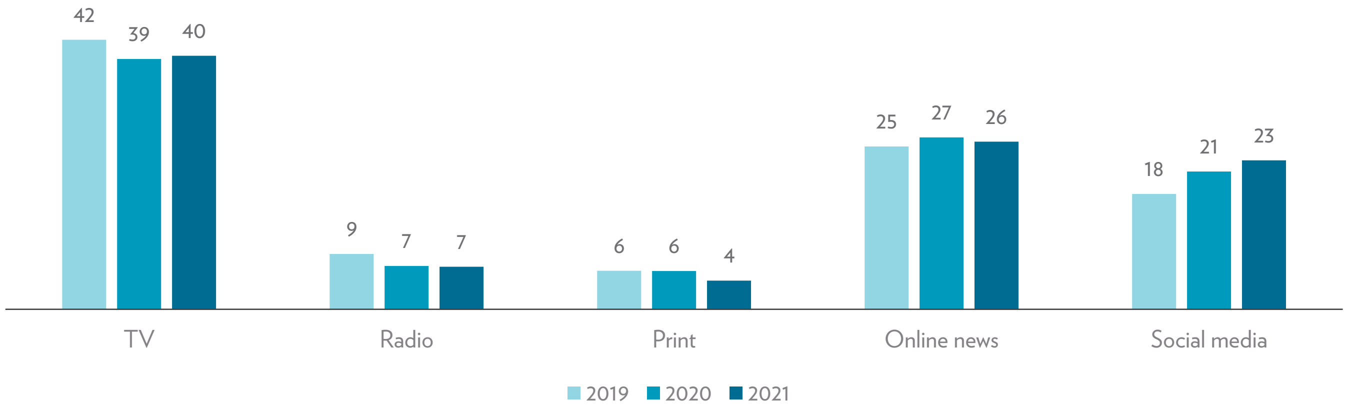



[Q3] Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news? Please select all that apply. *Note: Prior to 2020 'blogs' were included as 'social media', in subsequent years they were not included in the questionnaire. [Base: N=2,034].

## SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS CONTINUES TO GROW IN POPULARITY

Since 2019, increasing numbers of Australians have been using social media as their primary source of news (18% to 23%). In contrast, there has been a gradual decrease in the proportion of consumers who rely on traditional news sources, such as TV, radio and print for news. The percentage of Australians mainly using online news sources is much the same (see **figure 4.6**).

**FIGURE 4.6**: MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS (%)



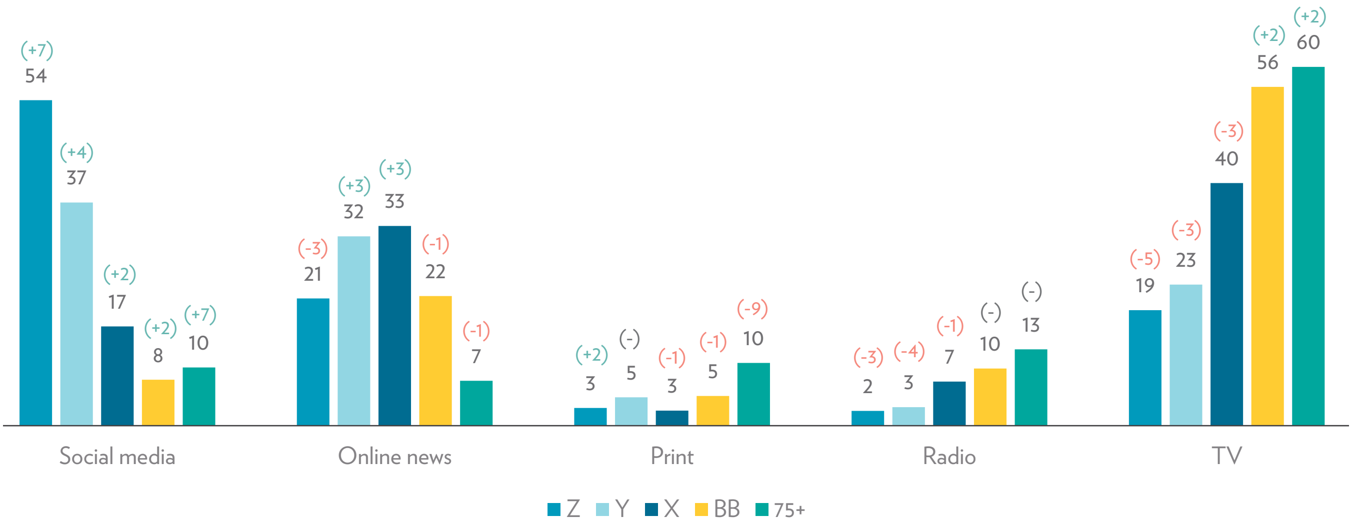

[Q4] You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your MAIN source of news? *Note: Prior to 2020 'blogs' were included as 'social media', in subsequent years they have been excluded. [Base: Those who used at least one source of news, N=1,909].

## SOCIAL MEDIA USE TRIPLES AMONG 75+ AS A MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS

As found in previous years, there is a distinct difference between generations and their preferred news sources. More than half of Baby Boomers (56%) and 75+ (60%) use TV as their main source of news, whereas only one in five of Gen Z (19%) do. Roughly one-third of Generations X and Y primarily access online news, more than other generations.

The use of social media as a main source of news has increased across all age groups since 2019. More than half of Gen Z (54%) now use social media as their main source of news (+7) (see **figure 4.7**). The proportion of news consumers aged 75+ who use social media as their primary source of news has more than tripled since 2019 (3% to 10%). At the same time, the proportion of people aged 75+ who mainly read newspapers has fallen to 10% (-9). This year is the first time that the use of social media and print have been comparable in this older age group. Furthermore, for the first time in this age cohort, the percentage who use radio as their main source of news (13%) is higher than print (10%).

**FIGURE 4.7**: MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS BY GENERATION (%)



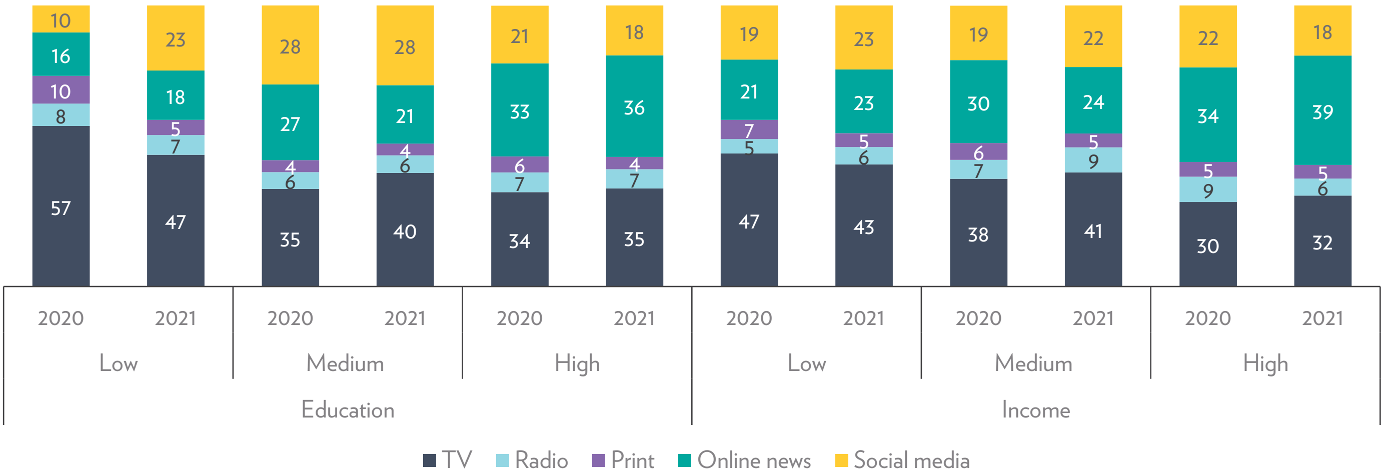

* Figures in brackets indicate percentage point change from 2019.

## THOSE WITH LOW EDUCATION ARE SHIFTING TO SOCIAL

News consumers with low education are more likely to rely on TV as their main source of news, but this fell to 47% in 2021 (-10). Instead, the proportion of this cohort who primarily use social media for news (23%) has more than doubled since last year (+13) (see **figure 4.8**). A similar trend was observed among those on low incomes.

TV is also the main source of news for this group, but this has fallen (-4), while social media has increased (+4). In contrast, the use of social media as a primary source of news among those with high incomes fell (-4) and grew for online news (+5).

**FIGURE 4.8**: MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS BY EDUCATION AND INCOME (%)




Regional consumers are also shifting to social media as their main source of news. While TV continues to dominate, there has been a move away from print and online since 2018 and a growing preference for social media as a main source of news (see **figure 4.9**).

Most Australian news consumers access news from 3 or fewer media platforms (75%). Since 2019, those who only access news via one increased by 7 percentage points and those who used 4 or more to get news fell by 4 percentage points. Overall, this suggests news consumers are consolidating their news consumption and accessing news via fewer media platforms. Gen Z is the most likely to rely on one medium for news with 37% accessing news via one source, compared to 20% of news consumers aged 75+ (see **figure 4.10**).

**FIGURE 4.9**: MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS BY REGION (%)

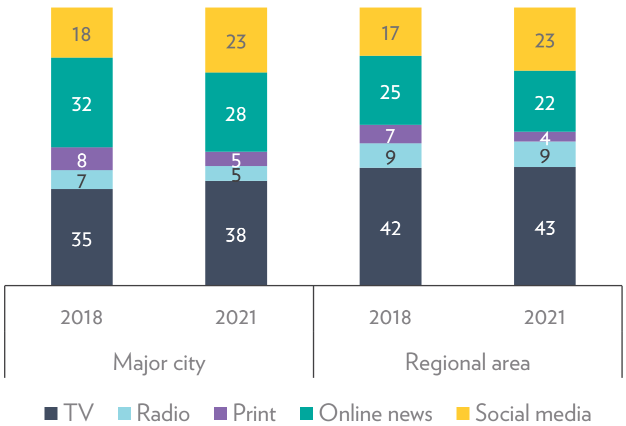
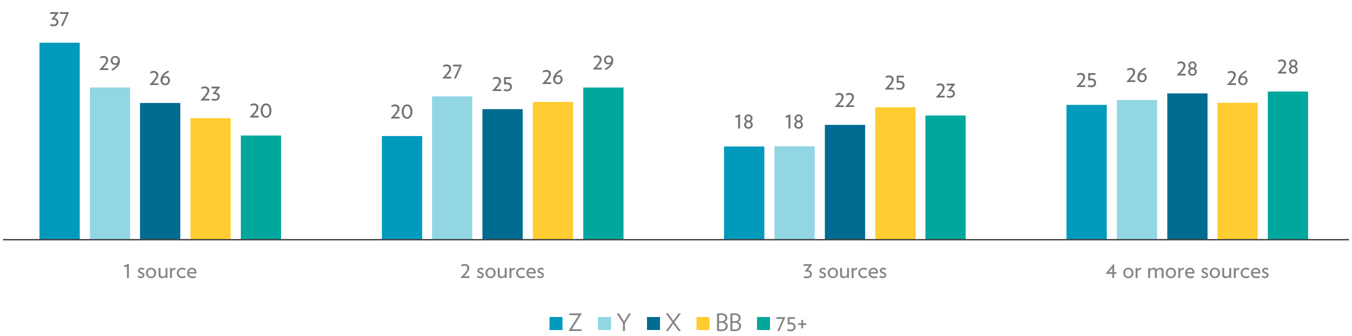



**FIGURE 4.10**: NUMBER OF NEWS SOURCES BY GENERATION (%)




*From the 10 options (Television news bulletins or programmes, 24 hour news television channels, radio news bulletins or programmes, printed newspapers, websites/apps of newspapers, websites/apps of news magazines, websites/apps of TV and Radio companies, websites/apps of other news outlets, social media) we counted the number of news sources. [Base: Those who used at least one source of news, N=1,909].

## ABC CONSOLIDATES ITS POSITION AS TOP OFFLINE AND ONLINE NEWS BRAND

ABC News is the most accessed offline news brand by Australians, followed by free-to-air TV news services (Channel 7, 9 and TEN) (see **table 4.1**). The top five TV news brands have remained relatively stable since last year.

Overall, newspaper consumption has declined in the last year. This is especially the case for regional or local newspapers, with a 5 percentage point decrease from 2020.

**Table 4.2** shows the percentage of Australian news consumers accessing online news brands. This year ABC News online (26%) outperformed News.com.au (22%) for the first time since 2018. The proportion of news consumers accessing ABC News online has increased slightly (+3) since 2020 and and dipped for the *Sydney Morning Herald* online (-2). Overall, there were no significant changes.

**TABLE 4.1**: OFFLINE NEWS BRAND ACCESSED

| | N | % (†) |
|---|---|---|
| ABC News* | 817 | 40 (-1) |
| Channel 7 | 786 | 39 (+1) |
| Channel 9 | 738 | 36 (-2) |
| Channel TEN | 387 | 19 (-3) |
| SBS TV | 296 | 15 (-) |
| Commercial FM radio (e.g. Triple M, Nova) | 226 | 11 (-) |
| A regional or local newspaper | 225 | 11 (-5) |
| Sky News | 205 | 10 (-2) |
| BBC News | 200 | 10 (-) |
| Herald Sun | 178 | 9 (-3) |
| The Australian | 170 | 8 (-1) |
| Daily Telegraph | 163 | 8 (-2) |
| Prime7 | 157 | 8 (-1) |
| Commercial AM radio (e.g. 2GB, 2UE) | 150 | 7 (-) |
| CNN | 145 | 7 (-) |
| WIN Television | 138 | 7 (-1) |
| Sydney Morning Herald | 131 | 6 (-2) |
| The Age | 130 | 6 (-) |
| Courier Mail | 121 | 6 (-) |
| Fox News | 120 | 6 (-) |
| Other Capital city newspapers | 96 | 5 (+2) |
| The Advertiser | 96 | 5 (-) |
| Australian Financial Review | 78 | 4 (-1) |
| Other newspapers or broadcast news channels from outside country | 62 | 3 (-) |
| News channels or newspapers in languages other than English | 49 | 2 (-1) |

† % point change since 2020

[Q5A] Which of the following brands have you used to access news offline in the last week (via TV, radio, print, and other traditional media)? Please select all that apply. *ABC News includes both ABC TV and ABC Radio (ABC local, RN, News Radio, Triple J etc.). [Base: N=2,034].

**TABLE 4.2**: ONLINE NEWS BRAND ACCESSED

| | N | % (†) |
|---|---|---|
| ABC News Online | 527 | 26 (+3) |
| News.com.au | 445 | 22 (-1) |
| 7News.com.au | 353 | 17 (+3) |
| nine.com.au | 352 | 17 (-1) |
| Guardian Australia online | 220 | 11 (-1) |
| BBC News online | 207 | 10 (-2) |
| Sydney Morning Herald (smh.com.au) | 200 | 10 (-2) |
| The Age (theage.com.au) | 166 | 8 (-) |
| CNN.com | 150 | 7 (-1) |
| Skynews.com.au | 147 | 7 (-2) |
| Daily Telegraph (dailytelegraph.com.au) | 143 | 7 (-2) |
| Herald Sun (heraldsun.com.au) | 142 | 7 (-1) |
| The Australian (theaustralian.com.au) | 141 | 7 (-1) |
| Other regional or local newspaper website | 133 | 7 (-) |
| The New Daily | 113 | 6 (-) |
| Australian Financial Review (afr.com) | 102 | 5 (+1) |
| PerthNow.com.au | 100 | 5 (-1) |
| Courier Mail (couriermail.com.au) | 98 | 5 (-1) |
| New York Times online | 94 | 5 (-1) |
| Mail online | 92 | 5 (+2) |
| The Conversation | 86 | 4 (-) |
| 10Daily.com.au | 70 | 3 (-1) |
| The Advertiser (adelaidenow.com.au) | 68 | 3 (-1) |
| BrisbaneTimes.com.au | 57 | 3 (-) |
| Other online sites from outside Australia | 57 | 3 (-) |
| Crikey | 55 | 3 (+1) |
| The Saturday Paper online | 54 | 3 (+1) |
| Other non-English online news sites | 35 | 2 (-) |

† % point change since 2020

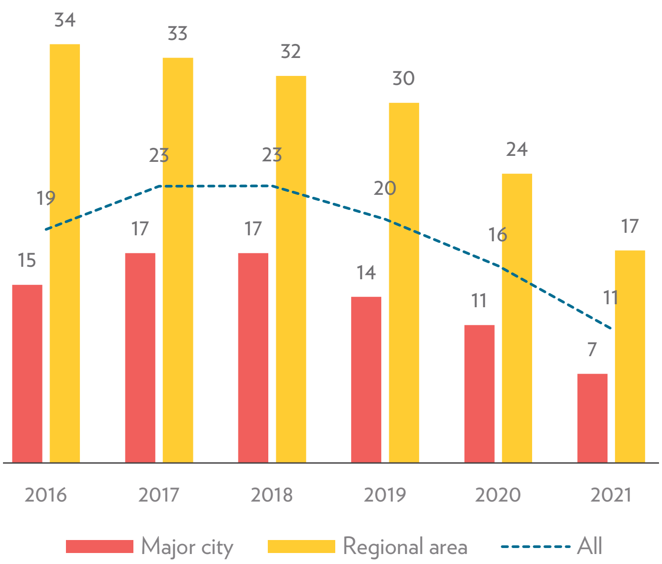
[Q5B] Which of the following brands have you used to access news online in the last week (via websites, apps, social media, and other forms of Internet access)? Please select all that apply. [Base: N=2,034].

## REGIONAL NEWSPAPER AUDIENCES CONTINUE TO SHRINK

Regional and local newspapers have continually lost readership since 2016. The proportion of regional Australians saying they read their local or regional newspaper has halved to 17% in 2021 (see **figure 4.11**). The drop has accelerated since 2019 and is likely related to the fact that many regional and local newspapers have either closed or suspended their print editions.

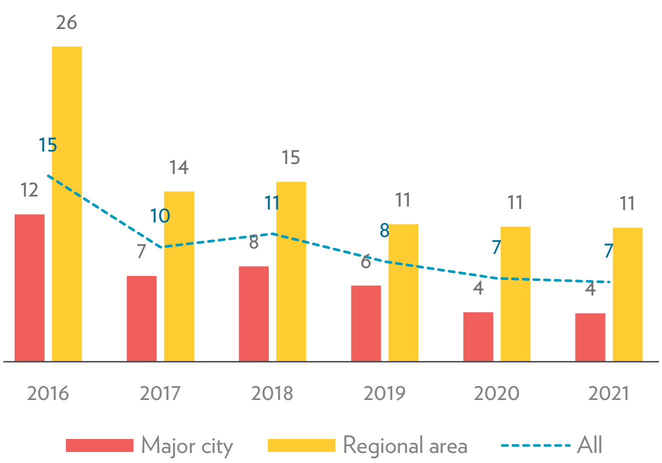
To a lesser degree, this is also the case for online regional or local news websites. The proportion of regional residents who access local or regional newspaper websites has decreased slightly since 2017 but remained steady at 11% (see **figure 4.12**).

**FIGURE 4.11**: REGIONAL OR LOCAL NEWSPAPER USE 2016–2021 (%)




[Q5A] Which of the following brands have you used to access news offline in the last week (via TV, radio, print, and other traditional media)? A regional or local newspaper. [Base: N=2,034].

**FIGURE 4.12**: REGIONAL OR LOCAL NEWSPAPER WEBSITE USE 2016–2021 (%)

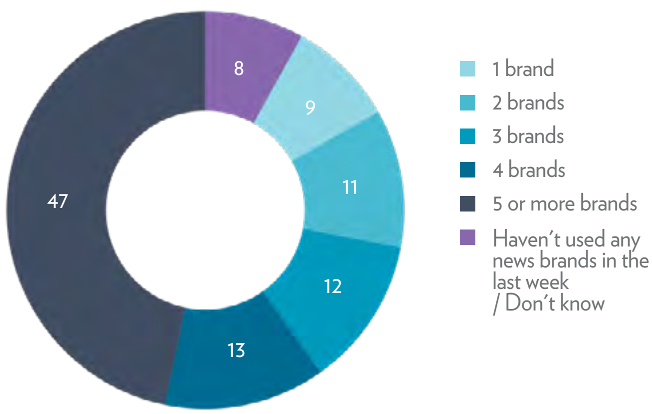



[Q5B] Which of the following brands have you used to access news online in the last week (via websites, apps, social media, and other forms of Internet access)? Other regional or local newspaper website. [Base: N=2,034].

## AUSTRALIANS ARE ACCESSING FEWER NEWS BRANDS

We added up both online and offline brands that respondents accessed in the past week. The number of news brands being used by Australians has fallen. Almost half of news consumers (47%) use 5 or more news brands, which is a decrease from 2020 (-5) (see **figure 4.13**). In addition, the proportion of consumers using only 1 news brand has increased (+2) to 9%. There has also been an increase in the percentage of people saying they haven't accessed any brands in the past week (+2) to 8%.

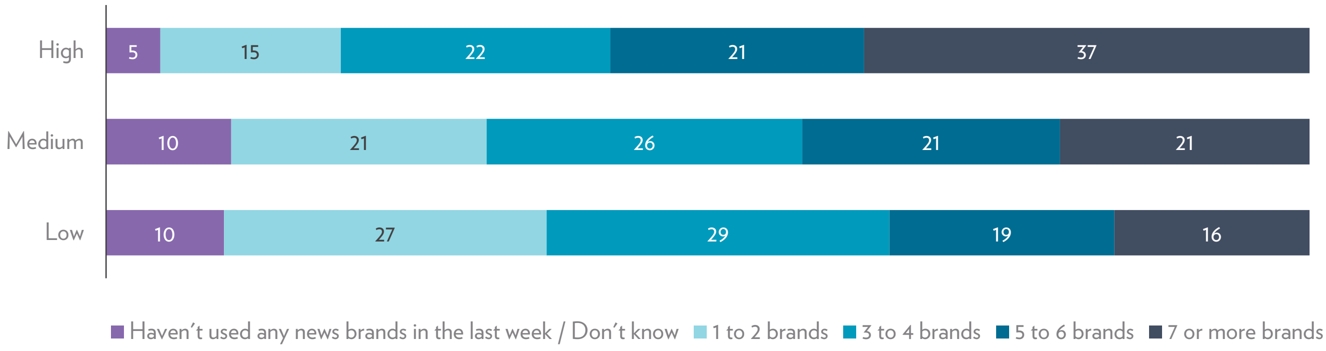
**FIGURE 4.13**: NUMBER OF NEWS BRANDS ACCESSED (%)




*28 offline and 30 online (total 58) brands. [Base: N=2,034].

The data continue to show that consumers with high education and income are more likely to use more news brands than those with low and medium education and income. More than one-third of those with high education access 7 or more news brands, whereas only 16% of those with low education do (see **figure 4.14**). Similarly, 34% of those with high incomes access 7 or more news brands, compared to only 5% on low incomes. Those with low education and income are much more likely to have not accessed any news brands in the past week.

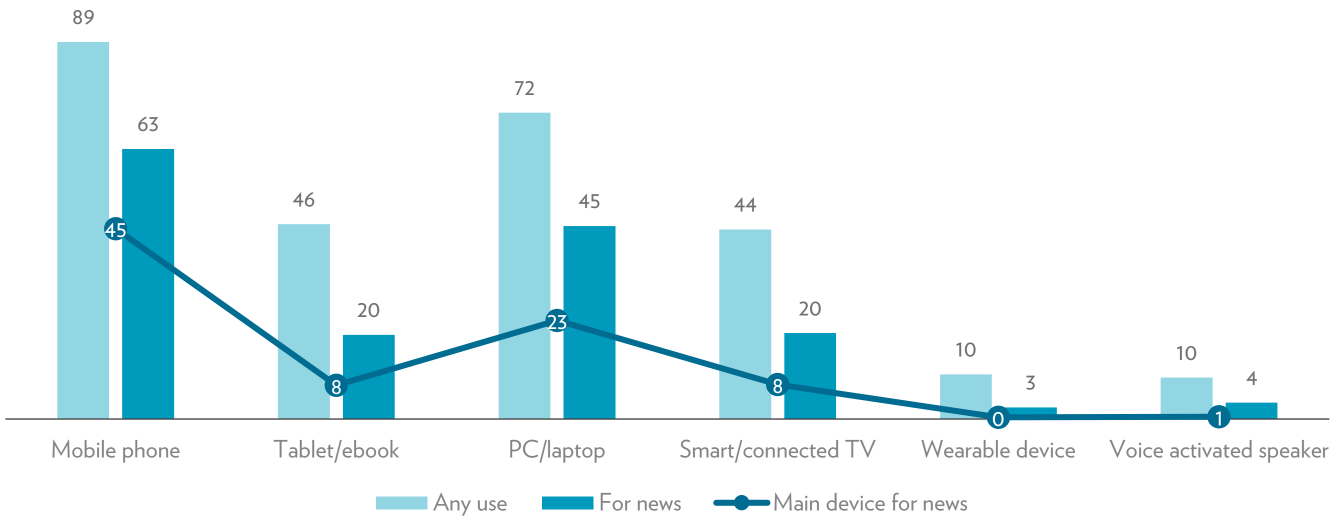
**FIGURE 4.14**: NUMBER OF NEWS BRANDS BY EDUCATION (%)




## DEPENDENCE ON MOBILE PHONES GROWS

The majority of Australian news consumers (63%) use mobile phones to access news generally compared to desktop or laptop computers (45%) (see **figure 4.15**). One in five use tablets/ebooks and smart/connected TV to get their news. The percentages of people using wearable devices (3%), or voice activated speakers (4%) for news remain very low.

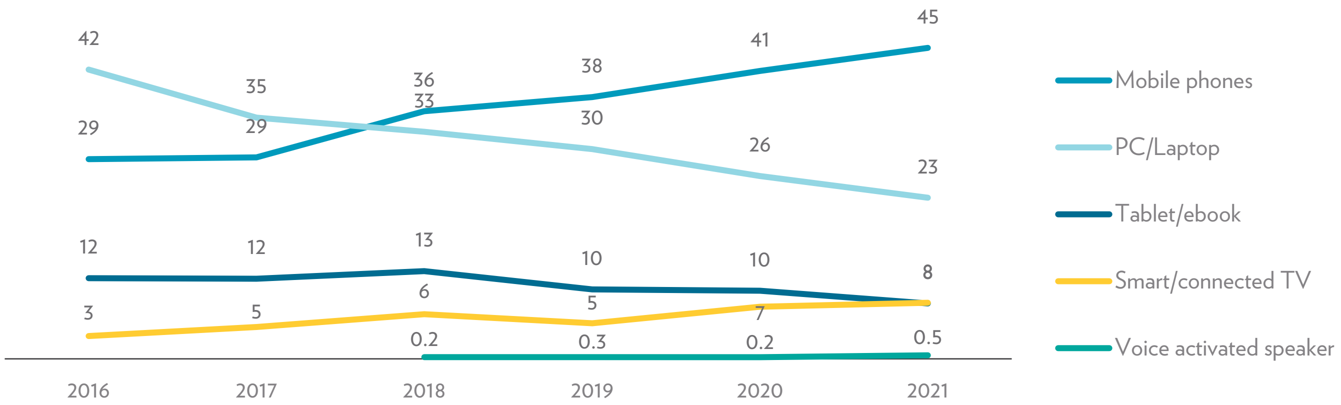
**FIGURE 4.15**: DEVICES FOR ACCESSING NEWS (%)




**[Q8B]** Which, if any, of the following devices have you used to access news in the last week? Please select all that apply. **Mobile phone** [Smartphone made by Apple (iPhone); Smartphone by another manufacturer (e.g. Samsung, LG, Huawei, Sony, Oppo, Xiaomi, etc.); Other internet connected phone]; **Tablet/ebook** [Tablet Computer made by Apple (e.g. iPad, iPad Air or iPad mini); Other tablet computer (e.g. Samsung Galaxy, Amazon Fire, Asus ZenPad etc.); Ebook reader (e.g. Kindle, Kobo etc.)]; **PC/laptop** [Laptop or desktop computer (at work or home)]; **Smart/Connected TV** [Connected TV (a TV that connects to internet via set top box, games console, other box such as Apple TV etc.); Smart TV (TV that connects to the internet directly without the need for any other box)]; **Wearable device** [Smart watch or wristband that connects to the internet]; **Voice activated speaker** [Voice activated connected speaker (e.g. Amazon Echo, Google Home, AppleHomePod)]; None of these; Don't know. [Base: N=2,034]. **[UK8b6_5]** Those who use any devices for news. You've said you use the following devices to access news in the last week, which is your MAIN way of accessing online news? [Base: N=2,034]

Mobile phones have become the dominant device for online news access, with 45% of Australians saying their mobile is the **main** device they use to access news, which is a 4 percentage point increase from 2020 (see **figure 4.16**). The gradual increase in the use of smart/connected TV for news is noticeable. However, tablet/ebook use has declined continually over the last few years, and the gap with mobile phones has widened. Smart speakers remain unpopular with Australians as a main way to access news.

**FIGURE 4.16**: CHANGES IN THE MAIN DEVICE FOR ACCESSING ONLINE NEWS 2016–2021 (%)

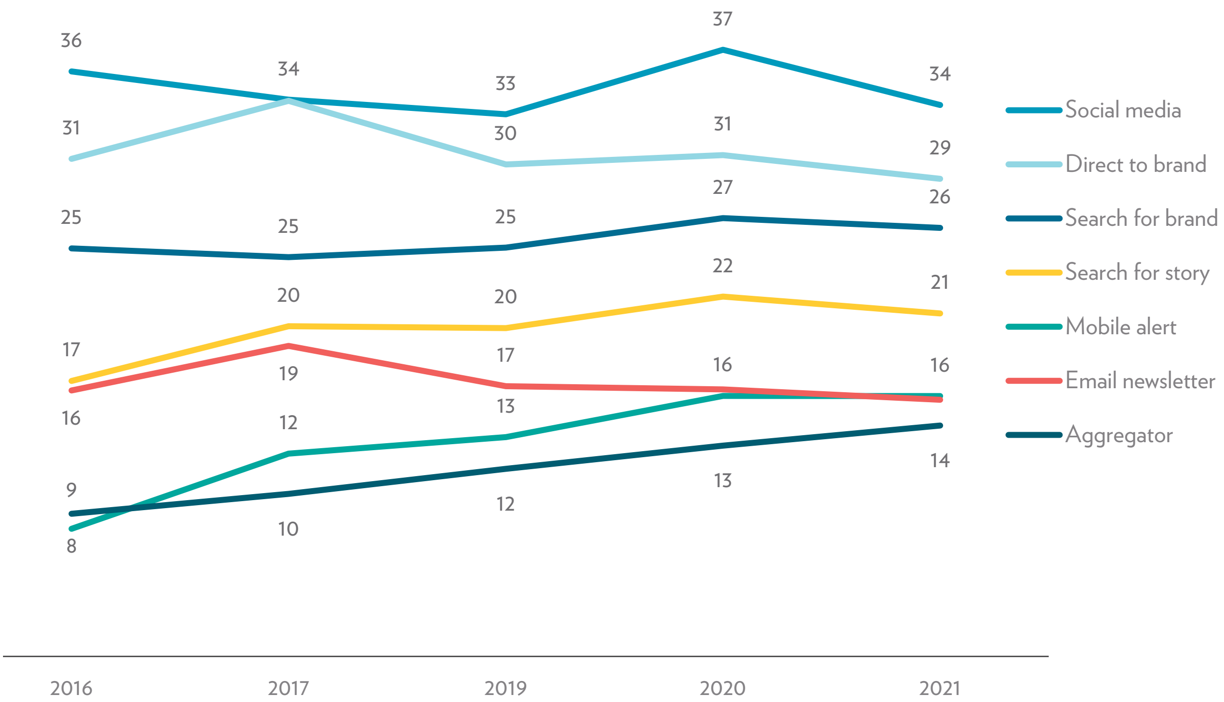



## NEWS AGGREGATORS AND MOBILE ALERTS INCREASE IN POPULARITY

Australians are finding their way to online news via a range of pathways. In 2021, 29% say they go directly to the website or app of a news brand (i.e., News.com.au/ABC News online) and 26% say they search for a news brand via a search engine, such as Google (see **figure 4.17**). The top method of finding online news is via social media (34%) and this has been the case for the last 5 years. While there are fluctuations from year to year, most pathways, including going direct to brand or via social media, have seen little change in popularity over time. However, the use of mobile alerts (16%) and news aggregators (14%) has steadily increased since 2016.

Interest and frequency of news access are key factors. Those who are heavy news consumers and have high interest in news and politics are more likely to go directly to the website of a news brand.

**FIGURE 4.17**: PATHWAYS TO ONLINE NEWS (%)

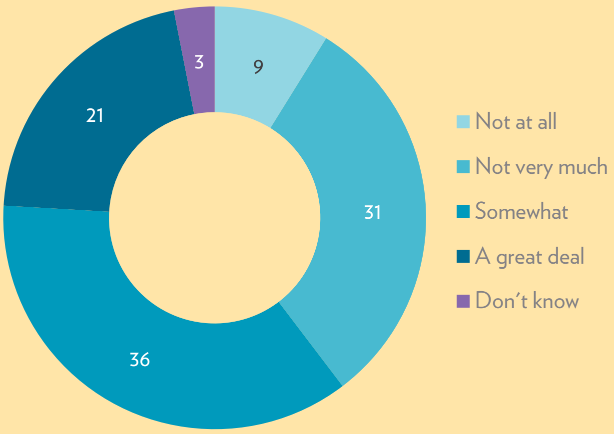



[Q10] Thinking about how you got news online (via computer, mobile or any device) in the last week, which were the ways in which you came across news stories? Please select all that apply. [Base: N=2,034].

This year we asked respondents how much the COVID-19 pandemic has changed things for them personally. More than half of Australians (57%) feel that COVID-19 has had an impact on them. One-fifth (21%) say the pandemic has greatly changed their lives, 36% say it changed 'somewhat', and 31% say 'not very much'. Only 9% do not feel that COVID-19 has changed their lives at all. Three percent said they don't know (see **figure 1**).

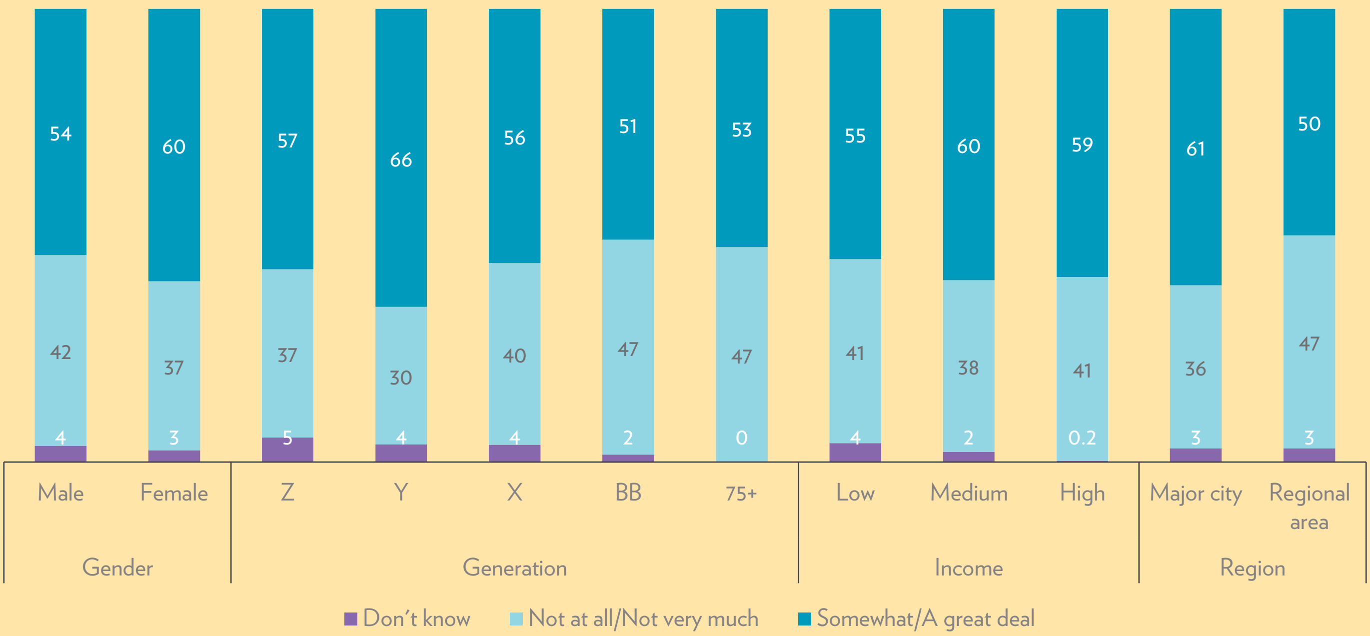
Women are more likely to say the pandemic has impacted on their circumstances (60%) than men (54%) (see **figure 2**). Gen Y is most likely generation to think the pandemic has impacted on them personally with 66% reporting COVID-19 has changed their lives to some extent. Those with high education and income are more likely to think that COVID-19 changed their lives than those with low education and income. City dwellers are more likely to perceive the impact of COVID-19 than those in regional areas.

**FIGURE 1**: COVID-19 IMPACT (%)




[Coronaimpact] Thinking about all aspects of your life, how much, if at all, has the coronavirus (COVID-19) situations changed things for you personally? [Base: N=2,034]

**FIGURE 2**: COVID-19 IMPACT BY DEMOGRAPHICS (%)

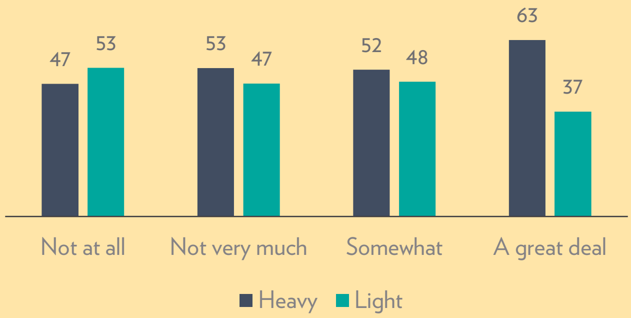


## THOSE WHO FEEL THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC TURN TO NEWS

**Figure 3** shows that those who report a higher impact of the pandemic on their lives accessed news more frequently. This is consistent with the finding in the *COVID-19: Australian News and Misinformation* report, where the majority (78%) of those who were concerned about COVID-19 also experienced an increase in their news consumption.

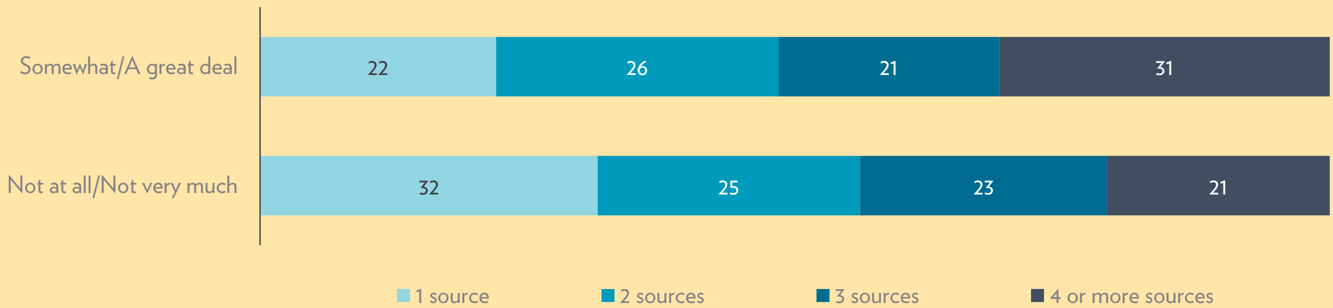
Those who feel COVID-19 has changed their lives are more likely to access news from more mediums. Almost one-third (31%) who feel COVID-19 had an impact on their lives accessed news via 4 or more news mediums, compared to one-fifth (21%) of participants who said the pandemic had little impact on their daily life. (see **figure 4**).

**FIGURE 3**: NEWS ACCESS AND IMPACT OF COVID-19 (%)




Q. Thinking about all aspects of your life, how much, if at all, has the coronavirus (COVID-19) situations changed things for you personally? (Little impact: not at all/not very much, impact: somewhat/a great deal) [Base: N=2,034].

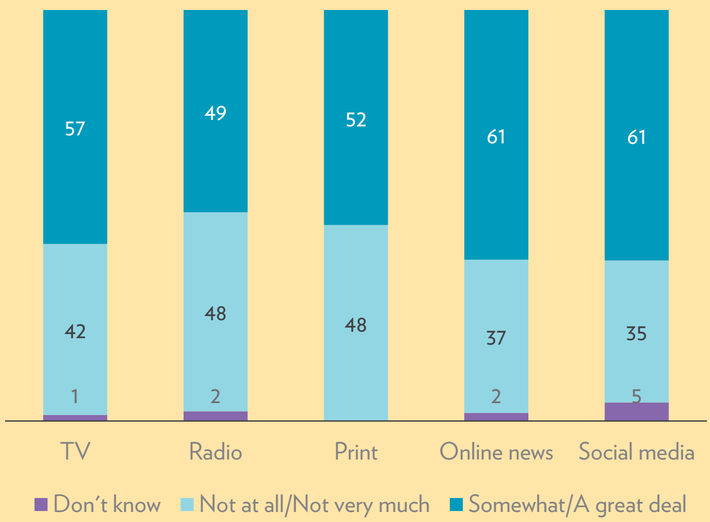
**FIGURE 4**: COVID-19 IMPACT BY NUMBER OF NEWS SOURCES (%)




## SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE NEWS CONSUMERS FEEL THE IMPACT OF COVID MORE

News consumers who primarily use social media and online news sources are more likely than print and radio users to say COVID-19 has had an impact on their lives (see **figure 5**).

**FIGURE 5**: COVID-19 IMPACT BY MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS (%)



## SUMMARY

The data show Australians are losing interest in the news. Despite a small increase during the early months of the pandemic, the proportion of Australians who say they are interested in the news has fallen to a low of 52%, an 8 percentage point drop from 2020.

The decline in news interest is echoed in the falling rates of news consumption. The steep increases in heavy news use during COVID-19 (69%), particularly on TV, have not been sustained. Instead, the proportion of Australians who consume news once a day or more has fallen back to 2019 levels.

At a time when credible news is more important than ever, these trends are perhaps surprising. It suggests that audiences lost interest in the wall-to-wall news coverage of the pandemic and turned their attention to other information and entertainment sources. COVID-19 information was also available via a range of non-news sources.

However, there were some increases and changes in news consumption behaviour among particular groups. While Gen Zs continue to be the lightest news consumers, their news consumption increased slightly over the past twelve months, in contrast to other generations that reduced their news access.

During COVID-19, older Australians have increasingly turned to social media platforms to get news. The percentage of 75+ who use social media as their main source of news has more than tripled in two years from 3% to 10%. Among this age group, social media is now comparable to print use. For the first time, the percentage of news consumers who use radio as their main source of news has overtaken that of news consumers who use print.

This shift towards social media as a primary news source among older Australians is part of a gradual movement away from traditional news media, including TV, radio, and print. The percentage of Australians who mainly use social media or online news sources is increasing, even though social media as a general source of news has not changed much.

The shift to online and social media is made easier by mobile phones which are now the most popular device for online news consumption. In 2021, 45% of Australians primarily use their mobile phone to get online news, compared to 23% relying on their laptop of computer. This gap is widening.

The data bring further bad news for newspapers, particularly in regional areas. Overall newspaper audiences continue to shrink and among regional audiences there has been a bigger fall. Since 2016, the proportion of regional participants reading regional or local newspapers has fallen from 34% to 17% in 2021. Online newspaper audiences have also declined from 15% to 7% over the same period. The sharp drop in regional newspaper consumption is a possible reflection of the extensive closures and contractions of local news outlets in recent years.

This data presents a dilemma for news outlets who experienced high demand for news during the pandemic but have not been able to maintain the high level of consumption.


# 5 EMERGING NEWS HABITS

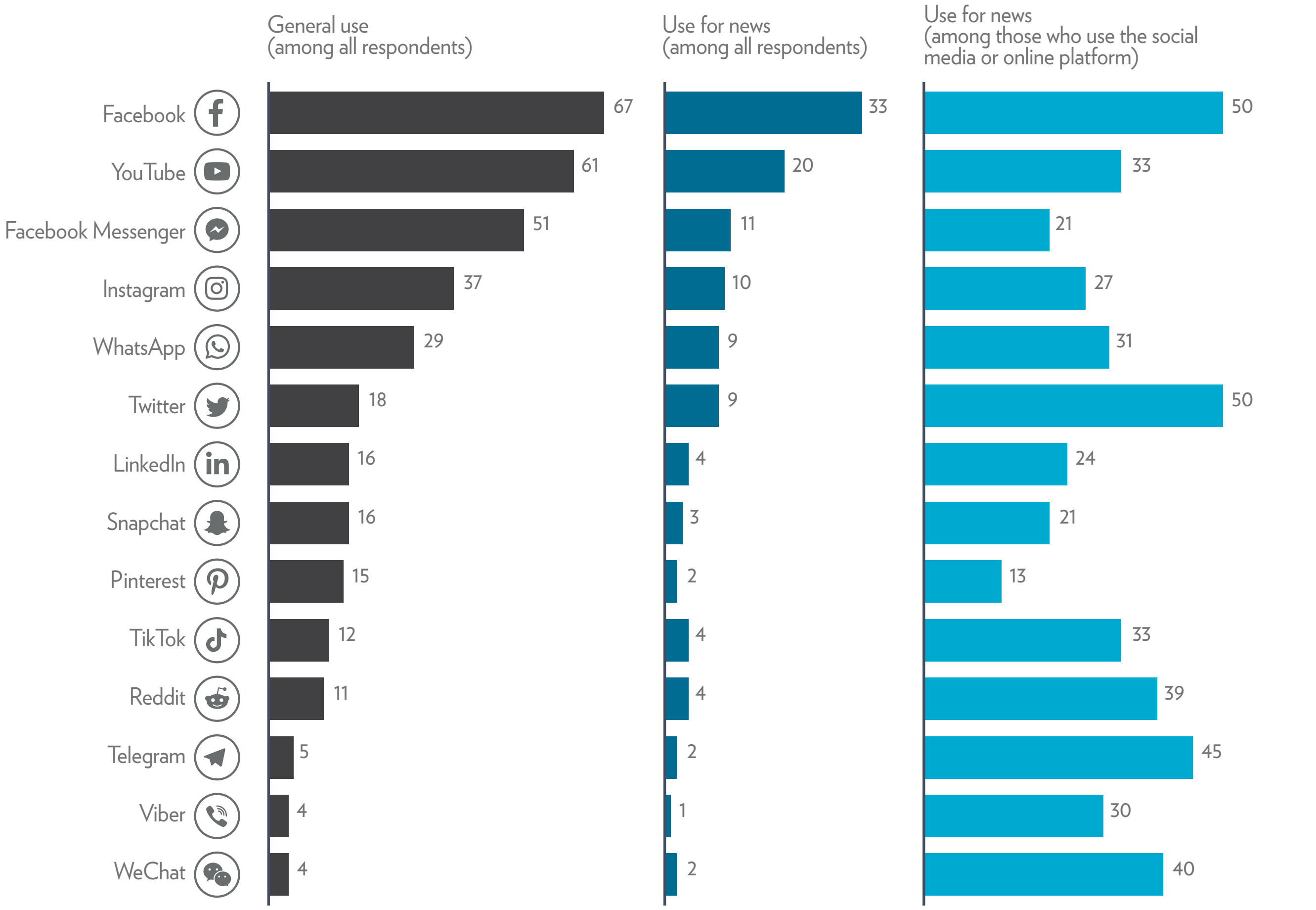
- While the overall use of social media for news has stayed around the same, Facebook for news has gradually decreased since 2016.
- Almost half of those who use Facebook for news (46%) say they mainly see news incidentally while on Facebook for other reasons.
- While using platforms for news, Facebook (31%), Twitter (32%) and YouTube (30%) users say they mostly pay attention to mainstream news outlets and journalists.
- News consumers are increasingly sharing news on messaging apps and less on social media.
- The most common reason for not listening to podcasts is lack of time (22%) and podcasts not providing anything that can't be found elsewhere (19%).

**News consumers are accessing news online from an increasingly diverse range of sources including news videos, podcasts, social media and messaging apps. This chapter examines aspects of how Australian news consumers seek out and interact with news through non-traditional news platforms and how online and social media news habits are changing over time.**

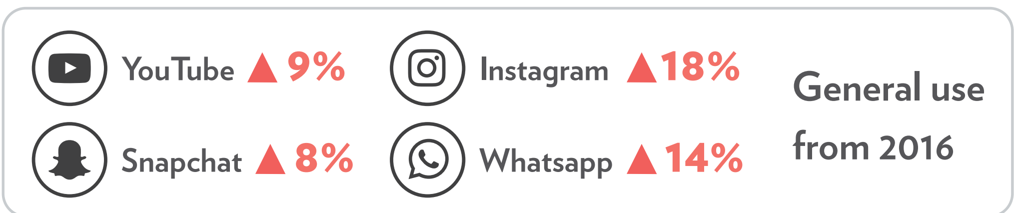
## SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR NEWS

In 2021, the most popular social media platforms for general use are Facebook (67%), YouTube (61%) and Facebook Messenger (51%). Across the board, Australians use social media much less for news compared to general use. Only a third say they use Facebook to access news, and one-in-five saying they use YouTube. The proportion of news use is highest among Twitter (50%) and Facebook (50%) users (see **figure 5.1**).

**FIGURE 5.1:** SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS USED (%)




[Q12A] Which, if any, of the following have you used for any purpose in the last week? Please select all that apply. [Q12B] Which, if any, of the following have you used for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week? [Base: N=2,034].



## FACEBOOK IS DECLINING WHILE OTHER PLATFORMS ARE RISING

General use of Facebook has fallen slightly since 2016, but has increased for other digital platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube and Instagram. The use of Facebook for news has fallen while YouTube and Instagram have grown as sources of news in the past five years (see **figure 5.2**).

There are distinct differences in the way that generations use social media platforms. Eighty-five percent of Gen Z use YouTube generally and 35% use it for news. Facebook is used by 65% of Gen Z and by 34% for news. More than half of those aged 75+ use Facebook generally but only 24% use it for news. Among those 75+ there has been an increase in the use of YouTube for news from 9% in 2019 to 15% in 2021 (see **figure 5.3**).

**FIGURE 5.2:** SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM USE GENERAL AND FOR NEWS (%)

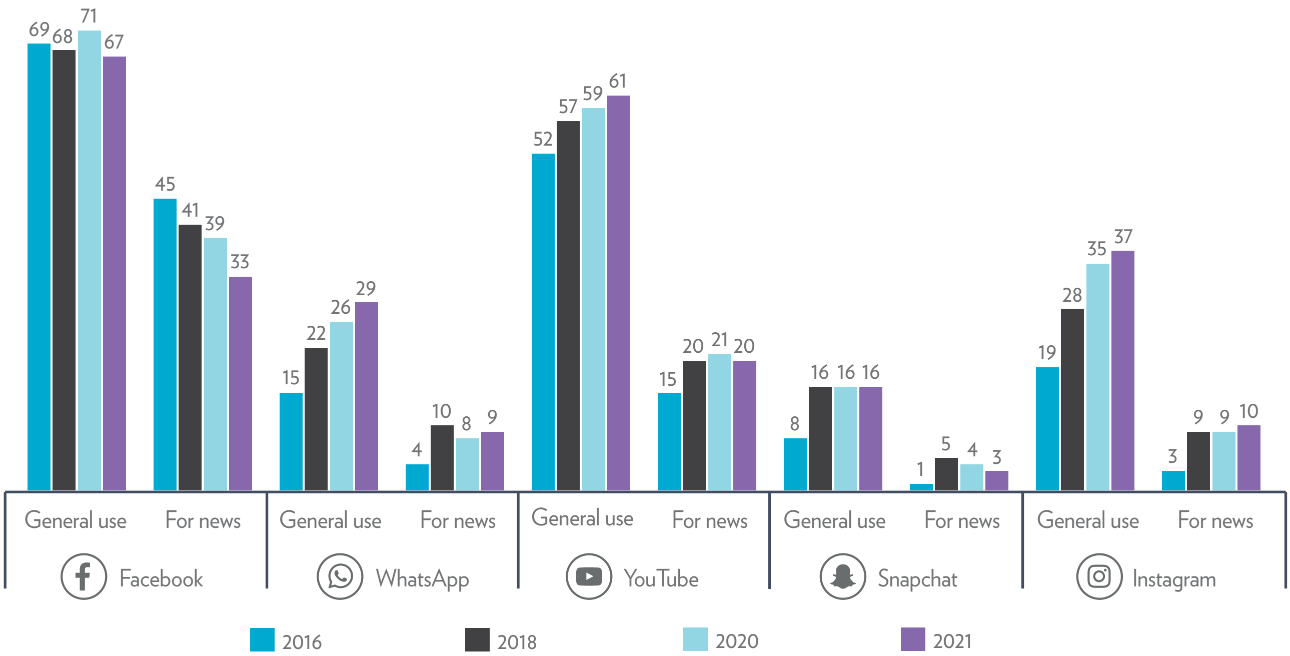
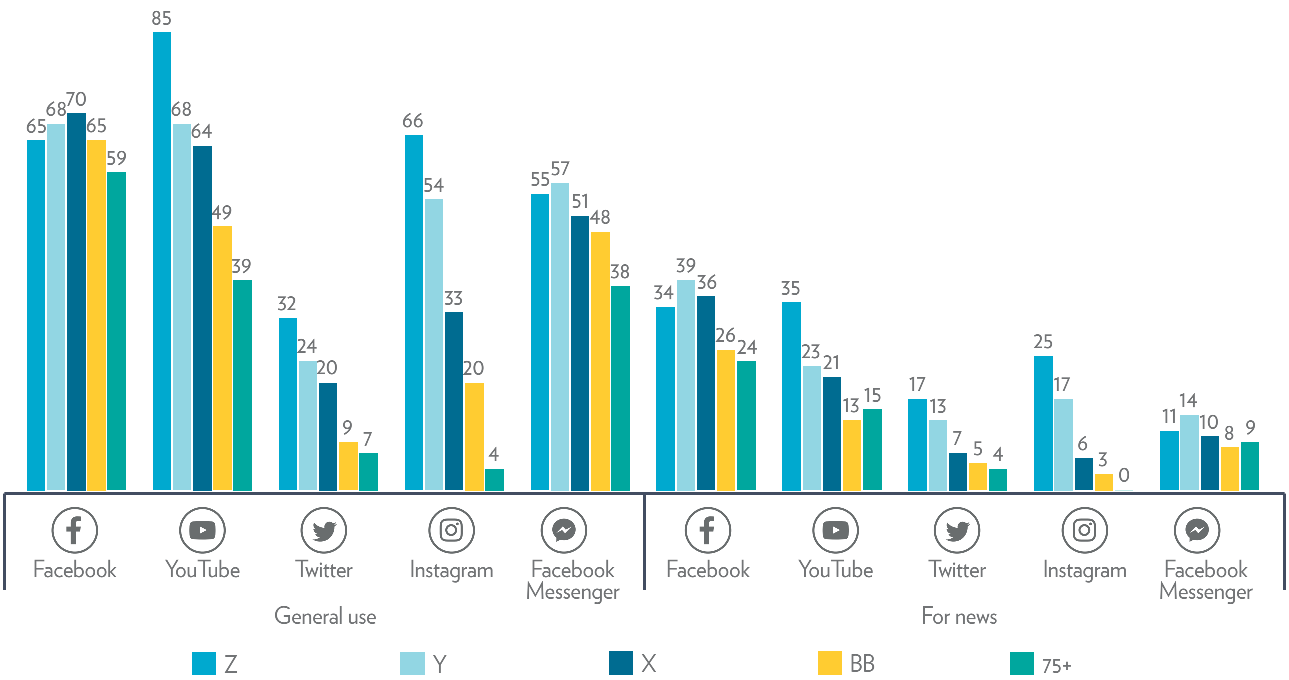



**FIGURE 5.3:** SOCIAL MEDIA USE GENERAL AND FOR NEWS BY GENERATION (%)



## NEWS CONSUMPTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA IS MAINLY INCIDENTAL

This year we asked participants why they use social media platforms for news. The most common response is that users are consuming news incidentally while they are on the platform for other reasons (Facebook: 46%, Twitter: 23%, YouTube: 21%, Instagram: 31%). Among those who use Facebook for news, 13% say they use it because they enjoy the debate and comments alongside the news, and only 11% say the platform is a good place to get the very latest news. Among those who get news on YouTube, 17% say it is a good place to get the very latest news. For Twitter news users, 21% say they enjoy the debate and comments alongside the news. Twenty-two percent of those who use Instagram for news say it is a fun and entertaining way to pass the time (see **table 5.1**).

**TABLE 5.1:** TOP 5 MAIN REASONS FOR USING PLATFORM FOR NEWS (%)

| Facebook | % | Twitter | % | YouTube | % | Instagram | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I mostly see news while I'm there for other reasons | 46 | I mostly see news while I'm there for other reasons | 23 | I mostly see news while I'm there for other reasons | 21 | I mostly see news while I'm there for other reasons | 31 |
| Enjoy the debate and comments alongside the news | 13 | Enjoy the debate and comments alongside the news | 21 | Good place to get the very latest news | 17 | Fun and entertaining way to pass the time | 22 |
| Good place to get the very latest news | 11 | Gives me perspectives not available in mainstream media | 19 | Gives me perspectives not available in mainstream media | 17 | Good place to get the very latest news | 12 |
| Fun and entertaining way to pass the time | 10 | Good place to get the very latest news | 16 | Fun and entertaining way to pass the time | 16 | Enjoy the debate and comments alongside the news | 10 |
| Gives me news that is personally important to me | 8 | Gives me news that is personally important to me | 9 | Gives me news that is personally important to me | 15 | Gives me news that is personally important to me | 10 |

[Q12_Social_motivations] You said that you use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat for news… What is the MAIN reason that you use platform for news? [Base among those who say they use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube for news (Facebook=498); (Twitter=105); (YouTube=253); (Instagram=102)].

Australians' reasons for accessing news on social media platforms differ somewhat from other countries. Australians are much more likely to say they are seeing news while on platforms for other reasons. Globally, those who use Twitter for news say it is a good place to get the latest news (25%), and news consumers on YouTube (21%) and Instagram (23%) are more likely to say they're consuming news as a fun and entertaining way to pass the time.

## MAINSTREAM NEWS OUTLETS AND JOURNALISTS ARE THE MOST POPULAR SOURCES OF NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

We asked participants when they are accessing news on social media what sources they were paying attention to. On Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, consumers say they are paying attention to mainstream news outlets and journalists the most. This is highest among Twitter (32%) and Facebook news consumers (31%). Instagram users (21%) are the most likely to say they pay attention to social media personalities/influencers compared to users of other platforms. In contrast, those who access news on Twitter, say they get news and information from politicians or political activists (19%), and Facebook news users are the most likely to pay attention to news from ordinary people (21%). For YouTube users who access news, 16% say they find news through smaller or alternative news sources (see **table 5.2**). Globally, the top source for news consumers on all platforms is mainstream news and journalists.

**TABLE 5.2:** TOP 5 SOURCES OF NEWS USERS PAY ATTENTION TO ON PLATFORMS (%)

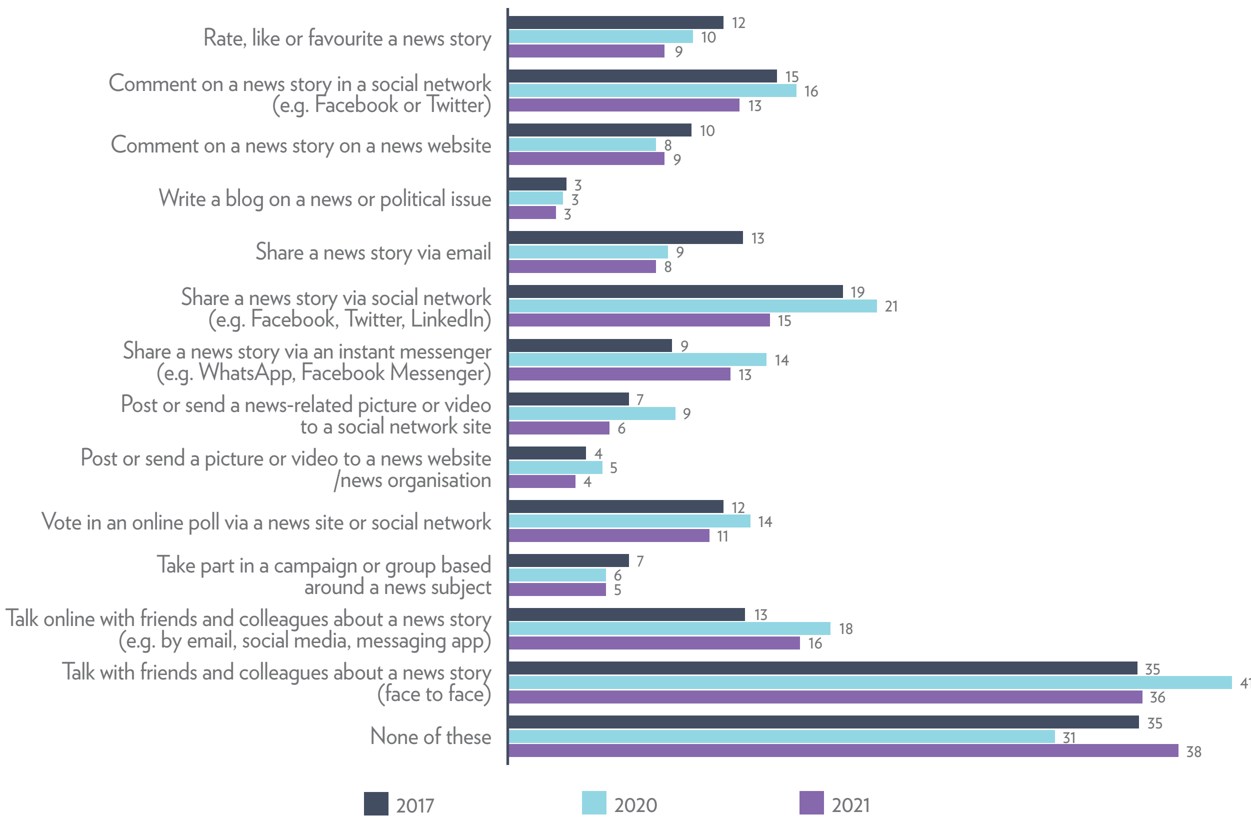
| Facebook | % | Twitter | % | YouTube | % | Instagram | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mainstream news outlets/ mainstream journalists | 31 | Mainstream news outlets/ mainstream journalists | 32 | Mainstream news outlets/ mainstream journalists | 30 | Mainstream news outlets/ mainstream journalists | 23 |
| Ordinary people | 21 | Politicians/political activists | 19 | Smaller or alternative news sources | 16 | Social media personalities/influencers | 21 |
| Smaller or alternative news sources | 12 | Ordinary people | 18 | Politicians/political activists | 12 | Ordinary people | 20 |
| Politicians/political activists | 11 | Celebrities (e.g. musicians, actors, comedians) | 8 | Ordinary people | 11 | Celebrities (e.g. musicians, actors, comedians) | 10 |
| Social media personalities/influencers | 8 | Social media personalities/influencers | 7 | Social media personalities/influencers | 10 | Smaller or alternative news sources | 8 |

[Q12_Social_sources] You said that you use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, TikTok, Snapchat for news… When it comes to news on platform which of these do you generally pay the most attention to? [Base among those who say they use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube for news (Facebook=498); (Twitter=105); (YouTube=253); (Instagram=102)].

## SHARING NEWS ON MESSAGING APPS IS INCREASING

We asked respondents how they interact with, share and participate in news coverage both offline and online by doing this such as rating, liking, commenting, sharing, posting or talking about a news story. As found in previous surveys, the majority of news consumers (62%) have interacted with news in one or more ways, but 38% say they do not interact with news at all (see **figure 5.4**). Among those who do interact, the most common activity is talking with friends and colleagues face-to-face about a news story (36%) which has fallen 5 percentage points since 2020, possibly due to social isolation measures due to COVID-19. In 2021, only 15% of respondents say they share news stories on social media platforms (-6 from 2020), and only 13% say they do so on messaging apps (-1).

**FIGURE 5.4:** NEWS INTERACTION (%)



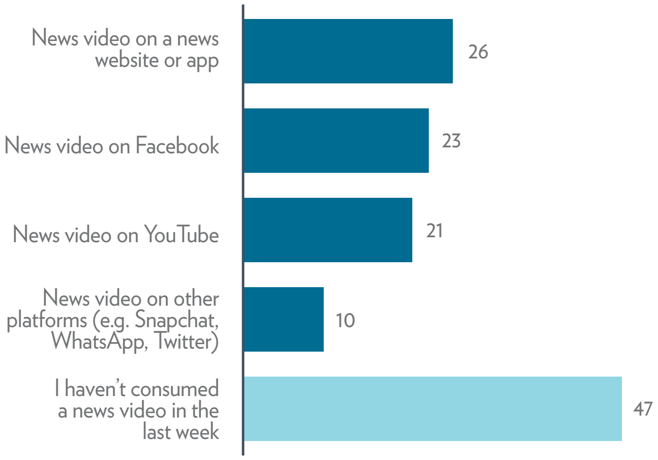

[Q13] During an average week in which, if any, of the following ways do you share or participate in news coverage? Please select all that apply. [Base: N=2,034].

## MORE THAN HALF CONSUME NEWS VIDEOS

With cheaper data and improvements in mobile internet speeds Australians are now commonly consuming video news through news websites, apps and social media platforms. In 2021, 53% of Australians say they have accessed a news related video in the past week. Over a quarter (26%) say they consumed it while browsing a news website or app, 23% while on Facebook and 21% while on YouTube (see **figure 5.5**). Those saying they consumed a news video on Facebook dropped from 29% in a year, while those using YouTube stayed the same. This is consistent with the general trend shown in **Chapter 4**, that the main pathways to online news are going directly to a news brand or via social media.

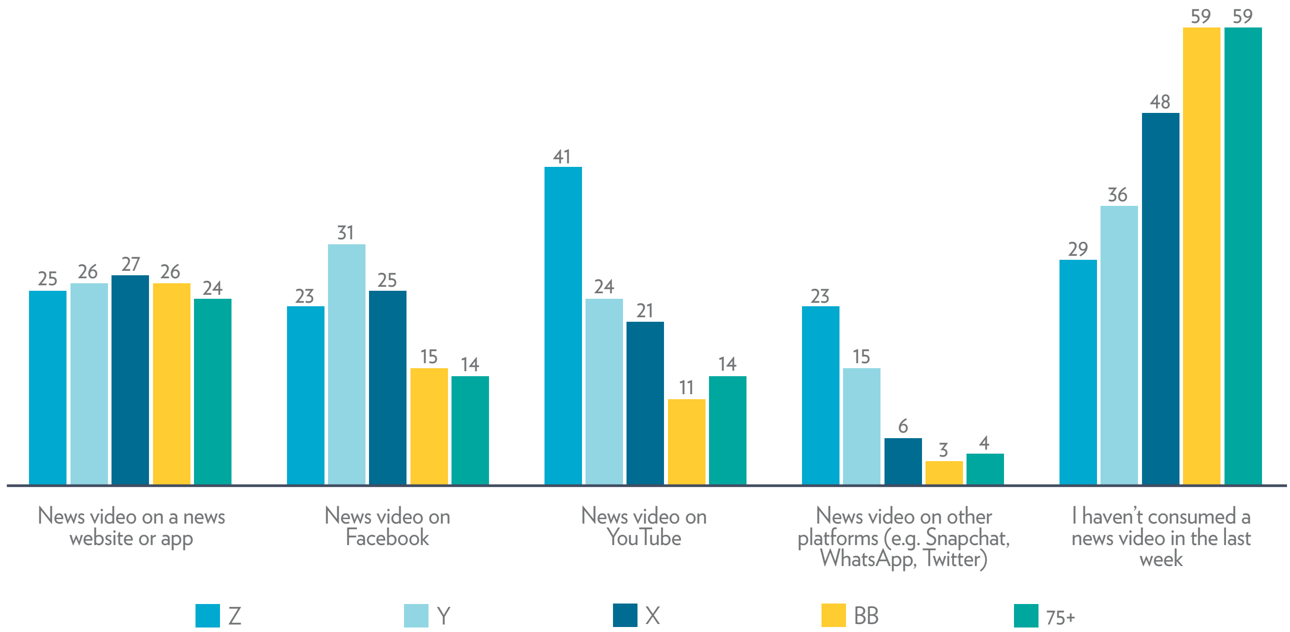
News videos are more commonly consumed by younger people. Among Gen Z news consumers, 41% say they accessed a news video on YouTube and 23% on other platforms such as Snapchat, WhatsApp or Twitter. For Gen Y, Facebook (31%) is still more popular than YouTube (24%) for news video consumption. Older generations are less likely to have consumed a news video in the last week (see **figure 5.6**).

**FIGURE 5.5:** NEWS VIDEO CONSUMPTION (%)




[Q11_VIDEO_2018a] Thinking about consuming online news video (of any kind) over the last week, which of the following did you do? Please select all that apply. I consumed a news related video (a short clip, a live stream or a programme) when browsing a news website or news app. I consumed a news related video (a short clip, a live stream or a programme) when on Facebook. I consumed a news related video (a short clip, a live stream or a programme) when on YouTube. I consumed a news related video (a short clip, a live stream or a programme) when on another platform (e.g. Snapchat, WhatsApp, Twitter). I haven't consumed any news related videos in the last week. [Base: N=2,034].

**FIGURE 5.6:** NEWS VIDEO CONSUMPTION BY GENERATION (%)




Gen Z **41%** watched a news video on YouTube

75+ **24%** watched a news video on a news website or app

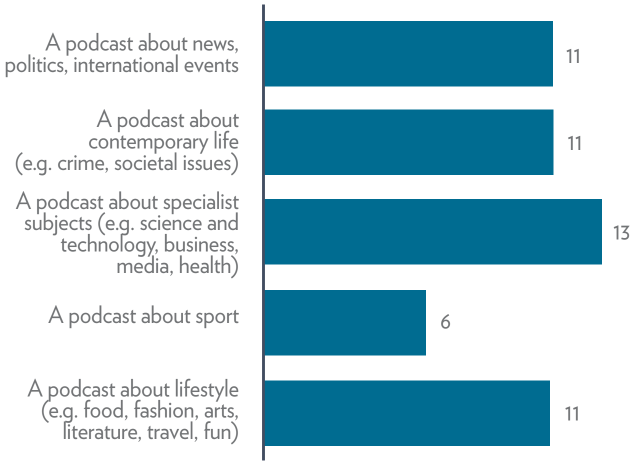
## SLOW UPTAKE OF PODCASTS IN AUSTRALIA

Less than a third (31%) of Australians say they have listened to a podcast in the last month, which is around the global average. Podcast use is up from 27% in 2019 but stayed around the same this year (-1 percentage point). While podcasts have become somewhat popular in recent years only 11% say they listen to podcasts specifically about news, politics or international events. Listeners use podcasts to hear about a range of topics and generally report actively seeking out subject matter that is of personal interest to them. Podcasts about specialist subjects are the most popular (13%) (see **figure 5.7**).

## PODCASTS APPEAL TO YOUNGER CONSUMERS

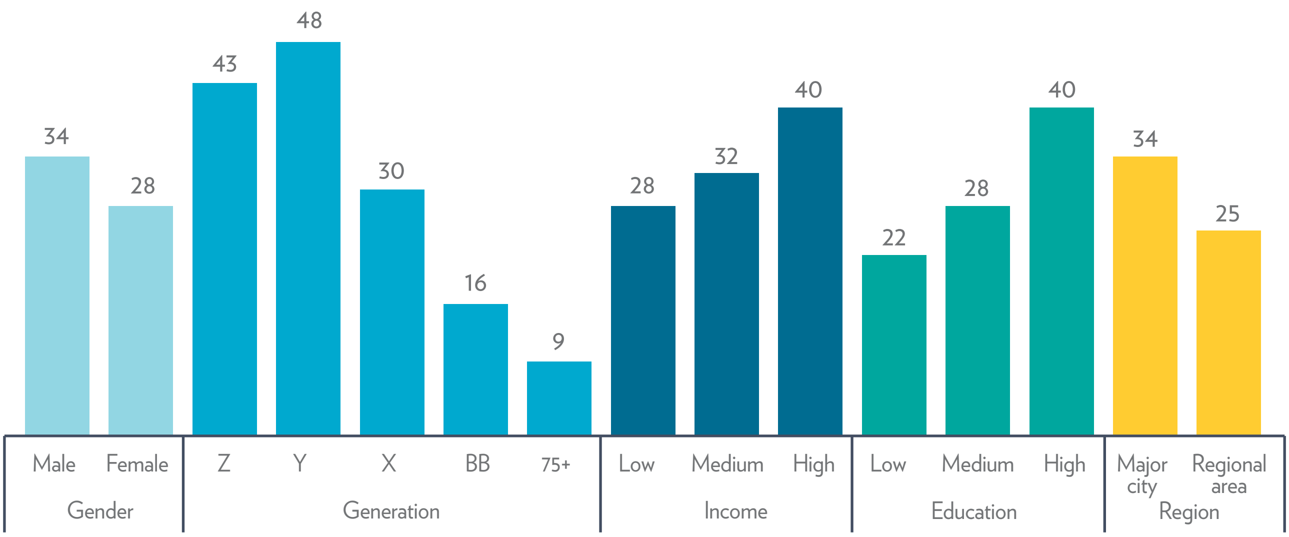
The audience for podcasts is skewed by generation. Those who listen to podcasts are more likely to be younger, male, have higher education and incomes, and live in the city. Among Gen Y consumers 48% say they have listened to a podcast in the past month compared to only 16% of Baby Boomers. Men (34%) are more likely to say they listen to podcasts than women (28%) (see **figure 5.8**). Also, those who are heavy news consumers (36%) are more likely than light news consumers (28%) to listen to podcasts in general.

**FIGURE 5.7:** PODCAST USE (%)




[Q11F_2018] A podcast is an episodic series of digital audio files, which you can download, subscribe or listen to. Which of the following types of podcast have you listened to in the last month? [Base: N=2,034]


**FIGURE 5.8:** PODCAST USE BY DEMOGRAPHICS (%)




[Base: Those who say they use podcasts, N=632].

## NEWS PODCAST LISTENING IS RELATED TO INTEREST IN NEWS AND POLITICS

Those who are heavy news consumers (15%), have high interest in news (16%) and politics (23%) are much more likely to say they listen to a podcast about news, politics or international events, compared to light news consumers (8%), with low interest in news (7%) or politics (6%) (see **figure 5.9**).

Younger Australians are much more likely to listen to podcasts with 48% of those under the age of 35 saying they listened to one in the last month, compared to only 23% of people aged 35 and over. The under 35 group is equally split between listening to podcasts about news, politics and events (18%), contemporary life (19%), specialist subjects (20%) and lifestyle (20%) but somewhat less likely to listen to podcasts about sport (9%) (see **figure 5.10**).

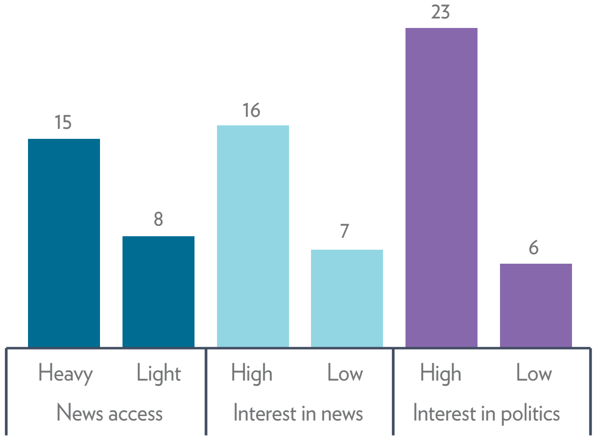
Currently most podcasts are available for free. The real shift in the future will be in where and how consumers listen to podcasts and if they pay for them. While there are dozens of podcast apps on the market the most popular platforms are operated by major digital platforms. Among those who say they used a podcast in the past month, 26% say they mainly use YouTube to listen to podcasts and 24% use Spotify. ABC Podcasts (15%) and ABC Listen (13%) are well liked but not as popular as Apple Podcasts (22%). Apps such as Podbean (6%), Audible (7%) and Pandora (7%) compete for comparatively smaller slices of the market (see **table 5.3**).

**TABLE 5.3:** MAIN PLATFORMS AND APPS USED TO LISTEN TO PODCASTS (%)

| Podcast App | % |
|---|---|
| YouTube (only if you use for podcasts) | 26 |
| Spotify (only if you use for podcasts) | 24 |
| Apple Podcasts | 22 |
| ABC Podcasts | 15 |
| Google Podcasts | 14 |
| ABC Listen | 13 |
| Podcast Addict | 8 |
| Pandora | 7 |
| Audible | 7 |
| Podbean | 6 |
| Spreaker | 6 |

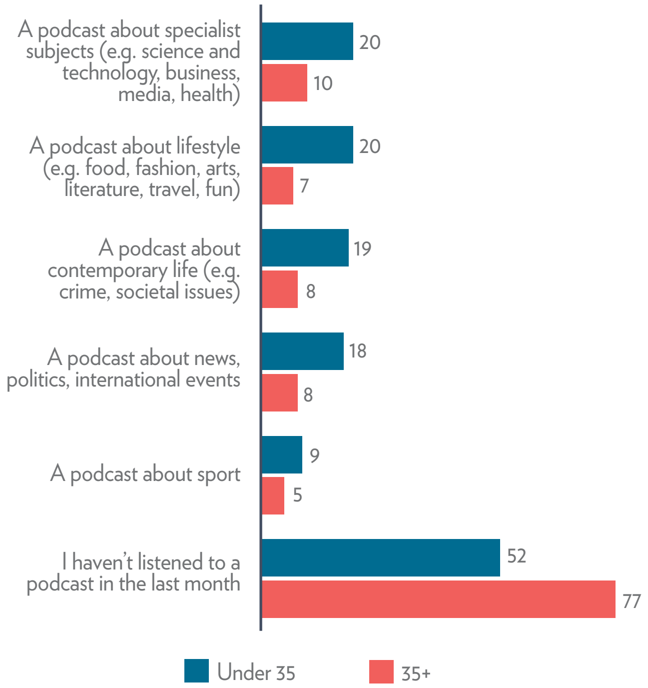
[POD2] Which of the following apps or websites do you mainly use to find and play podcasts? Please select all that apply. [Base: Those who say they use podcasts, N=632]

**FIGURE 5.9:** NEWS PODCAST USE BY NEWS ACCESS, INTEREST IN NEWS AND INTEREST IN POLITICS (%)




[Q1b_NEW] Typically, how often do you access news? By news we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper or online *Excludes extremely low and non-users; 'don't know'. [Base: N=1,915]. [Q1c] How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news? *Excludes 'don't know'. [Base: N=2,016]. [Q2_new2018] How interested, if at all, would you say you are in politics? *Excludes 'don't know'. [Base: N=2,011]

**FIGURE 5.10:** TYPES OF PODCAST USE BY GENERATION (%)

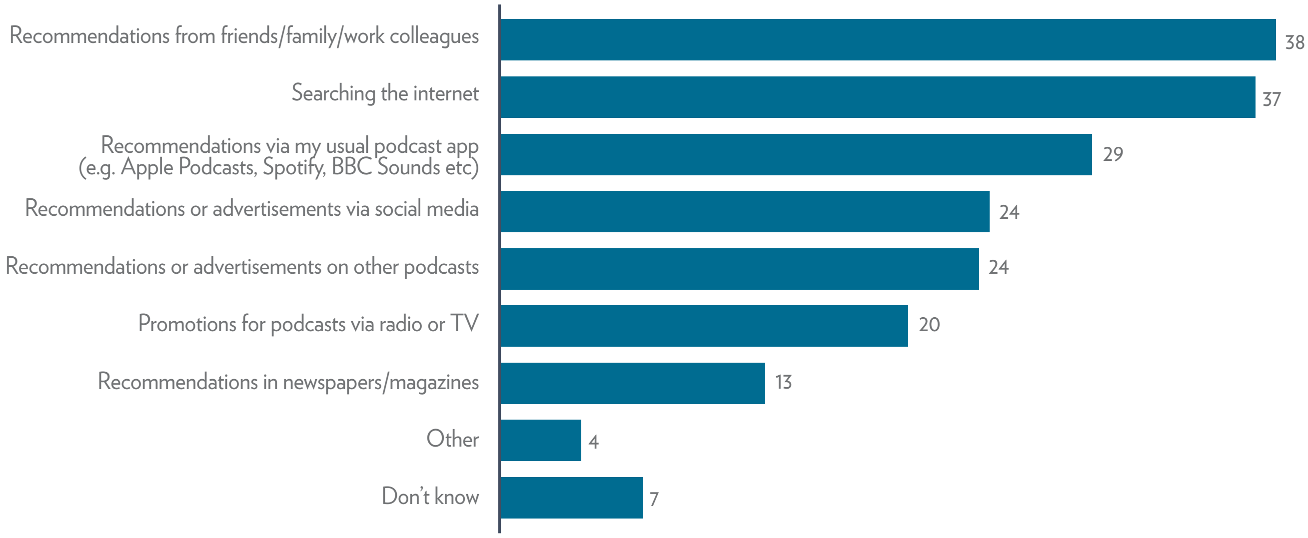



[Base: N=2,034]

## THE MOST COMMON WAY OF DISCOVERING PODCASTS IS BY PERSONAL RECOMMENDATION

Podcast listeners tend to find new ones from a range of sources. Thirty-eight percent of podcast listeners say they typically learn about new podcasts from recommendations by friends, family or colleagues and 37% say they learn about them from actively searching the internet. By contrast, 24% say they typically learn about new podcasts from recommendations on social media or advertisements on other podcasts (see **figure 5.11**).

**FIGURE 5.11:** PODCAST DISCOVERY (%)

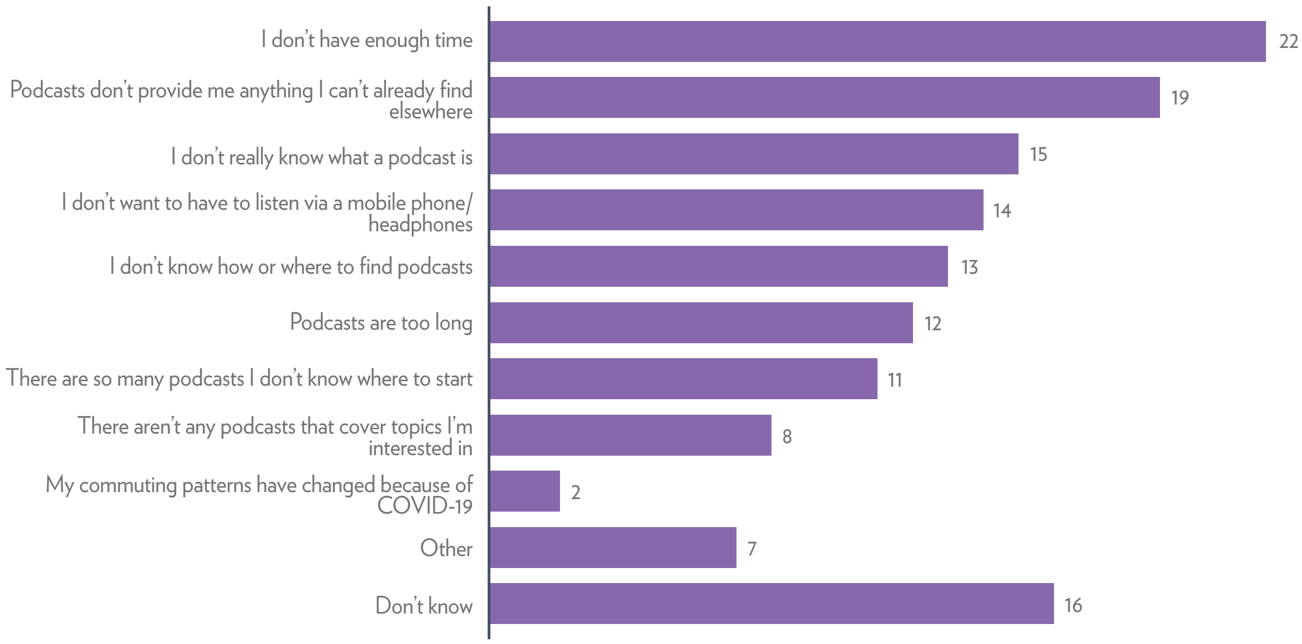



[Q11F_podcast_discovery] How do you typically discover (new) podcasts to listen to? Please select all that apply. [Base: Those who say they use podcasts, N=632]

## LACK OF TIME IS THE TOP REASON FOR NOT LISTENING TO PODCASTS

For those who say they don't listen, we asked them why. Few respondents say they don't know what podcasts are (15%), or how and where to find them (13%). This suggests that although only a third of Australians listen to podcasts there is much higher awareness of the medium overall. The most common response for non-users is that they don't have enough time (22%), and podcasts don't provide anything they can't find elsewhere (19%) (see **figure 5.12**).

**FIGURE 5.12:** REASONS FOR NOT LISTENING TO PODCASTS (%)

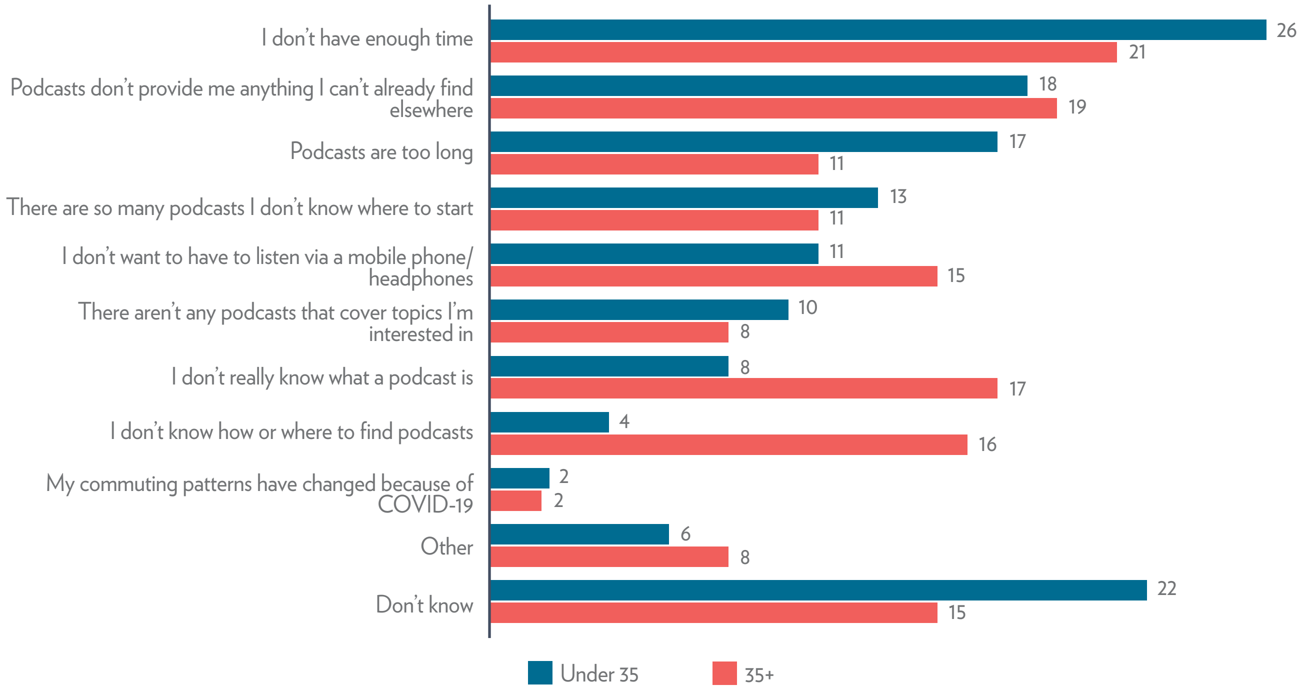



[Q11F_NOTLISTEN] You say you have not listened to any podcasts in the last month. What are the main reasons for this? Please select all that apply. [Base = Those who do not listen to podcasts , N=1,402]

## OLDER PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO NOT KNOW WHAT A PODCAST IS OR WHERE TO FIND THEM

Among non-listeners there are clear differences for not listening between younger and older Australians. Non-listeners under 35 are more likely to say they don't have enough time (26%) or that podcasts are too long (17%) compared to those aged 35 and over. The proportion of younger and older non-listeners who say podcasts don't offer anything new is around the same (U35: 18%, 35+:19%). Non-listeners 35 and over are much more likely to say they don't know what a podcast is (17%) or where to find them (16%) (see **figure 5.13**).

**FIGURE 5.13**: PODCAST NON-LISTENERS BY GENERATION (%)




## SUMMARY

As the data show, Australian news consumers are accessing news online from a diverse range of sources including news videos, podcast apps, and numerous social media platforms alongside traditional branded news websites. Those who are interested and engaged seek out more news sources and interact more through rating, commenting, posting and online discussion.

The emerging video news market is competitive, with platforms vying closely with branded news websites and apps for a share of the audience. No single platform has yet established a monopoly, and despite YouTube's prominent positioning among younger consumers it is not yet the default destination for video news that Google is to search. A likely reason for this is that although social is the most common main pathway to news online (see Chapter 4) it is common for consumers on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram to say they mostly see news incidentally while they are on those platforms for other reasons. Furthermore, many consumers say the news content they pay most attention to on social media is from mainstream news outlets or journalists.

While podcast use for news has not increased, the data show that consumers are very much aware of what podcasts are and where to find them, but they struggle to find the time to listen, or do not see them as a unique alternative to other sources. Podcasts are still very much the domain of special interest topics rather than news, politics or international events, but younger generations are the most likely to use podcasts for news so it is possible the market will develop over time.

# COMMENTARY

## GENERATION MILLZ: YOUNGER AUSTRALIANS ARE DRIVING CHANGES IN NEWS CONSUMPTION HABITS

**Yoonmo Sang**, Senior Lecturer, University of Canberra

This year's *Digital News Report: Australia* unpacks a survey that was taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey results show that Australian news consumers, while adapting to the challenges of living through a pandemic, turned to a variety of sources to get news. They tended to engage with news while they were using various platforms for other purposes, which demonstrates the importance of incidental news exposure. One noticeable trend is that young Australians are continually demonstrating emerging news habits, signalling the future landscape of news consumption.

**According to Pew Research Center's 2020 study of 12,638 U.S. adults, about a quarter of Americans (26%) get news from YouTube.[1]**

Based on content analysis of the 377 most popular YouTube news channels, the study also found that approximately half (49%) the channels are affiliated with established news organisations and 42% of channels are considered personality-driven independent channels.

The rise of YouTube as a source of news is also observed in the findings of this year's *Digital News Report: Australia*. While the percentage of consumers using Facebook for news has been declining over the past several years (from 45% in 2016 to 33% in 2021), the percentage using YouTube for news has increased (from 15% in 2016 to 20% in 2021).

If we focus on news video consumption, more than half (53%) of Australian news consumers said that in the past week they had consumed online news videos through news websites, apps, and social media platforms. Among those who consumed a news video, 21% consumed a news- related video through YouTube.

In Australia, most video news consumption still takes place on news websites or apps (26%), followed by Facebook (23%) and YouTube (21%). However, more and more people are turning to YouTube channels for news. The shift towards accessing news via YouTube is occurring more among young Australians. Among Australian Gen Z news video consumers, 41% accessed a news video on YouTube, followed by Gen Y (24%), Gen X (21%), Baby boomers (11%), and people over 75 (14%). In South Korea, as a point of comparison, YouTube's surge as a news source is driven by news consumers in their 50s and older.[2]

The top sources of news for those who use social media platforms for news were mainstream news outlets and mainstream journalists. This trend was found across social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram.

**The survey demonstrates that future generations of news consumers are increasingly becoming accustomed to obtaining news from YouTube. This will be the case at least for the foreseeable future.**

Australian news organisations may need to figure how to get the most out of YouTube and other online video platforms and reach out to news consumers. Also, it is expected that personality-driven independent channels by journalists or YouTube influencers will be increasingly competing with established news organisations.

There is no dramatic increase in podcast listening in Australia over the past few years. This year's *Digital News Report: Australia* shows that 31% of Australians listen to podcasts. In 2019, that figure was 27%. The survey also shows that only 11% of news consumers turn to news podcasts, while the most popular category deals with specialist subjects such as science and technology, business, media, and health (13%).

When it comes to podcast listening, members of Gen Y are leading the assorted generations. Just short of half Gen Y (48%) listens to podcasts, followed by Gen Z (43%), Gen X (30%), Baby boomers (16%), and people over 75 (9%). It is fair to say that the market of podcasts

[1] https://www.journalism.org/2020/09/28/many-americans-get-news-on-youtube-where-news-organizations-and-independent-producers-thrive-side-by-side/
[2] https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/culture/2021/03/703_275936.html

is being driven by younger Australians. But the potential of news podcasts is still not fully or properly understood.

While Australian news consumers tend to be incidentally exposed to news while they are on social media platforms for other purposes, news podcast listeners are rather actively seeking their news and they are avid consumers of it. A report from the News and Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra found that news podcast listeners are likely to seek podcasts that align with their viewpoints.[3] As the survey findings of the *Digital News Report: Australia* show, people's engagement with news is largely driven by political interest. It is often said that young people are not that interested in politics, though many observers challenge the claim. It would be interesting to see how the engaging nature of the podcast can stimulate the interest of young Australians in politics. As future generations of news consumers increasingly turn to news podcasts, researchers should devote more attention to the democratic potential and limitations of news podcasts in the digital age.

[3] https://apo.org.au/node/308947


**NEWS MOMENTS**
March 23, 2020 | Many Australians found themselves queuing at Centrelink offices around the country after COVID-19 restrictions put the economy into recession. The Government announced it would provide income support through it's JobSeeker and JobKeeper packages.
IMAGE: KELLY BARNES/ AAP IMAGE


# 6 TRUST AND MISINFORMATION

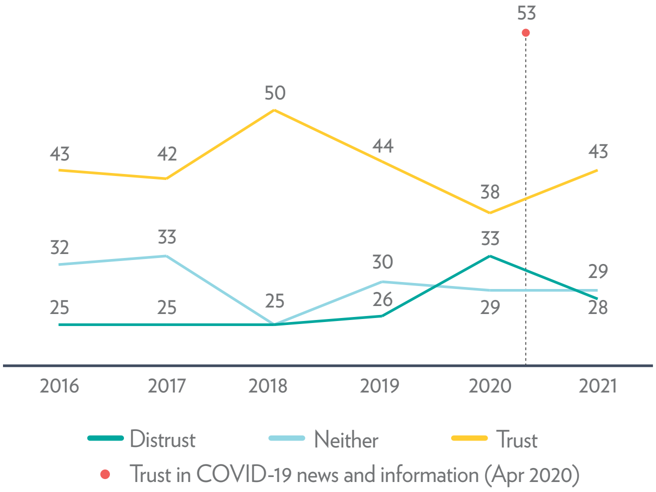
- Trust in news has rebounded (+5) to 43% but is well below the high of 53% trust in COVID-19 news coverage.
- Gen Z records the biggest increase in trust (+15) to 39%.
- Concern about misinformation remains high and steady (64%) with people most worried about COVID-19 misinformation being generated by activist groups (21%) and found on Facebook (30%).
- Misinformation about COVID-19 was encountered the most (38%), followed by politics (33%), and climate change (29%).
- Low educated consumers are less likely to know if they have encountered misinformation and are the least concerned about it.

## GENERAL TRUST IN NEWS HAS REBOUNDED BUT THE COVID TRUST BUMP HAS NOT BEEN MAINTAINED

After a low of 38% in 2020, general trust in news has risen to 43%[1] among Australian news consumers in 2021 (+5). As **figure 6.1** shows, the proportion of news consumers who say they trust most news most of the time has returned to a level comparable with 2016.

While general trust in news has increased, it is still not as high as trust in news and information about the COVID-19 pandemic, which reached 53% in April 2020[2]. Coverage of the pandemic tends to feature expert health opinion and official sources, which may have contributed to higher trust in news about COVID-19 specifically.

**FIGURE 6.1:** TRUST IN NEWS 2016-2021 (%)

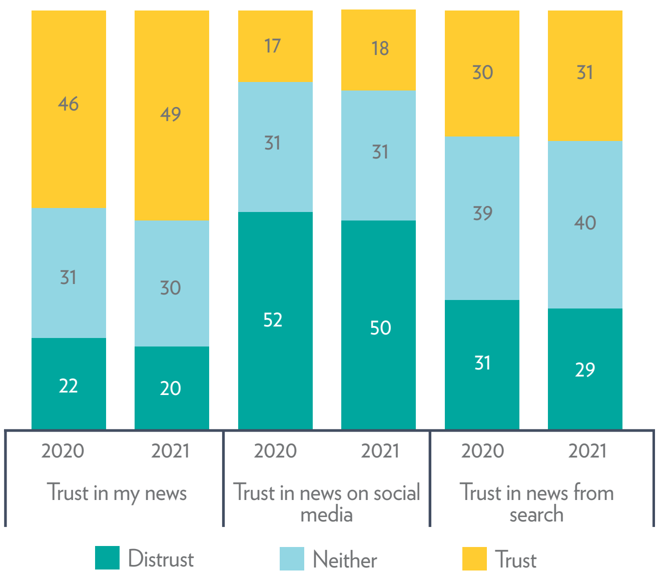



[Q12A] We are now going to ask you about trust in the news. First we will ask you about how much you trust the news as a whole within your country. Then we will ask you about how much you trust the news that you choose to consume. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: I think you can trust most news most of the time. [Base: N=2,034] **[April 2020: Q10h]** To what extent do you agree with the following statements about news and information provided about the coronavirus? I think I can trust most news. Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree. [Base: N=2,196].

## TRUST IN NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA REMAINS LOW

Trust in the news people use also rose (+3) to 49%. However, the increases recorded for trust in news generally, and for the news people use, did not translate to higher trust in news found via search engines and social media, which continues to be very low. In 2018, trust in news on social media was 24% and trust in news from search engines was 38%. These figures have fallen and plateaued since then. Over the past 12 months, trust in news found via search engines (31%, +1) and social media (18%, +1) did not change (see **figure 6.2**).

**FIGURE 6.2:** TRUST IN MY NEWS, TRUST IN NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, TRUST IN NEWS ON SEARCH (%)




[6_2016_6] Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: I think I can trust most of the news I consume most of the time. [Q6_2018_2] [Q6_2018_3] It is now possible to get online news in many different ways, including from search engines and social media sites. With this in mind, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. I think I can trust news in social media most of the time; I think I can trust news in search engines most of the time. Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree. [Base: N=2,034].

[1] This year we included extremely low and non news consumers in the survey. If we exclude these consumers, the trust figure is 45%. The extremely low and non news consumers' trust in news is much lower (23%).

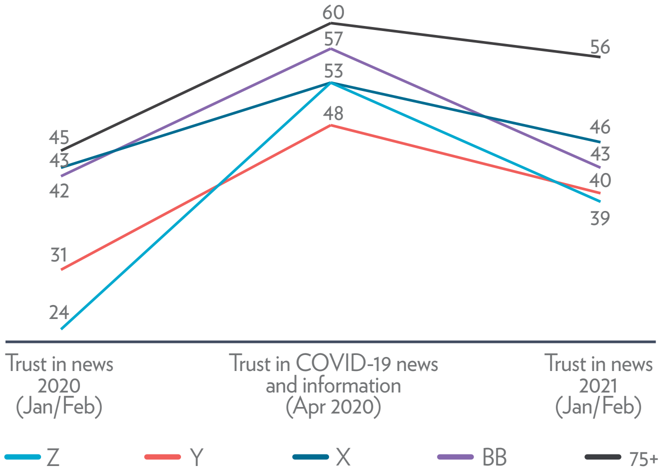
[2] Park, S., Fisher, C., Lee, J. & McGuinness, K. (2020). *COVID-19: Australian news and misinformation.* Canberra: News & Media Research Centre. https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-07/apo-nid306728.pdf

## GEN Z RECORDS BIGGEST INCREASE IN TRUST

Over the past 12 months, trust in news has increased the most among Gen Z audiences rising from 24% to 39% (+15). Their trust in COVID-19 news rose the most as well. However, their trust in news is still the lowest among all generations. Consumers 75+ also experienced a large increase (+11) in trust from 45% in 2020 to 56% in 2021 and their trust is the highest compared to other generations. Trust among Gen Y news consumers rose to 40% (+9), and +3 for Gen X to 46%. Trust remains relatively steady among Baby Boomers (+1).

While the data show large increases in trust since the 2020 survey, they are not as high as the levels of trust in news specifically about COVID-19, recorded in April 2020 (**figure 6.3**). As highlighted in **Chapter 4**, this increase in trust among Gen Z is partly a reflection of the big increase in news consumption in this age group during the past 12 months.

**FIGURE 6.3:** TRUST IN NEWS BY GENERATION 2020-2021 (%)




## TRUST IN NEWS DECREASES AMONG THOSE WITH LOW EDUCATION

Across demographic measures, trust either rose or stayed much the same over the past twelve months, with the exception of Australian news consumers with low levels of education. Among this group, trust in news fell (-4) from 46% in 2020 to 42% in 2021. In contrast, those with high levels of education recorded a big increase in news trust (+11) from 37% in 2020 to 48% in 2021 (see **figure 6.4**).

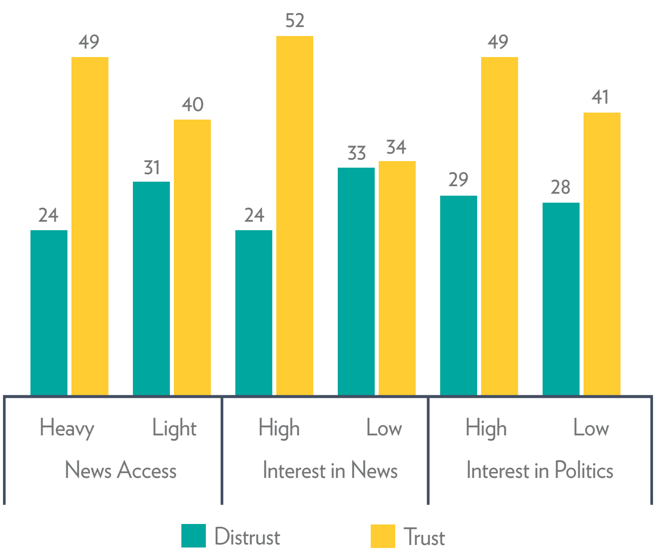
This year we included those who access news less than once a month or never in the sample for the first time. About 10% of those with low education belong to this group. In comparison with those with high (3%) or medium (8%) levels of education, this is a higher figure, indicating less interest and engagement with news among those with low education. These extremely low or non news consumers tend to have much lower trust in news (23%) compared to general news consumers (45%). This may partly explain why trust among those with low education has dropped.

**FIGURE 6.4:** TRUST IN NEWS BY DEMOGRAPHICS 2020-2021 (%)

## TRUST INCREASES THE MOST AMONG POLITICALLY ENGAGED NEWS CONSUMERS

Australians who are highly interested in news and politics, and consume a lot of news, recorded bigger increases in trust over the previous 12 months, than people with low levels of interest and consumption. Trust among heavy news consumers rose (+7) from 42% in 2020 to 49% in 2021; a similar rise was found among those interested in politics (42% to 49%, +7), and those interested in news (46% to 52%, +6) (see **figure 6.5**).

**FIGURE 6.5:** TRUST IN NEWS BY NEWS ACCESS, INTEREST AND POLITICAL INTEREST (%)




[Q1b_NEW] Typically, how often do you access news? By news we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper or online). More than 10 times a day; Between 6 and 10 times a day; Between 2 and 5 times a day; Once a day; 4-6 days a week; 2-3 days a week; Once a week. [Base: N=1,914]; [Q1c] How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news? Don't know was excluded [Base: N=2,017]; [Q2_new2018] How interested, if at all, would you say you are in politics? Don't know was excluded [Base: N=2,011].

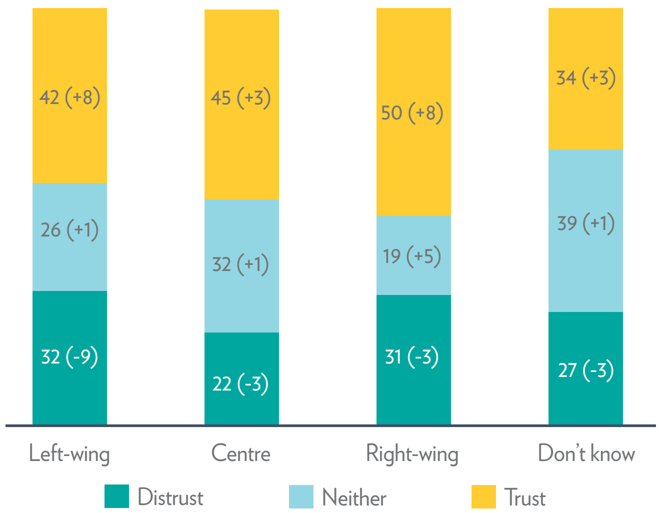
## TRUST REMAINS HIGHER FOR THOSE WHO USE MULTIPLE MEDIUMS FOR NEWS

Getting news from more than one medium (i.e. a combination of TV, print, radio, online news or social media) is still a reliable predictor of trust in news. As **figure 6.7** shows, in 2021 those who use four or more sources are much more likely to say they trust news (52%) compared to those who only use one source (38%). Trust is slightly higher for those using 2 sources (44%) and slightly higher again for 3 sources (48%). These figures have not changed since 2019, suggesting that trust among those who use multiple mediums is relatively stable.

## TRUST IN NEWS RISES ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM

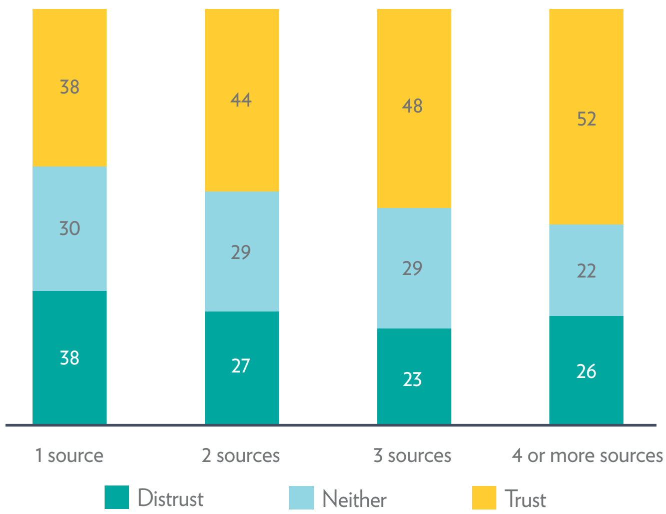
General trust in news has risen among Australians, regardless of their political orientation (see **figure 6.6**). While right-wing oriented consumers continue to have higher general trust in news than those who identify with the left or centre of politics, trust in news rose (+8) among both left-wing and right-wing audiences over the previous 12 months. Trust among those who identify with the left side of politics rose from 34% in 2020 to 42% in 2021 and distrust fell (-9). Among right-wing news consumers trust rose from 42% to 50%, with a smaller decline in distrust (-3). Trust in news rose the least among those who identify with the centre of politics and those who say they 'don't know' their political orientation.

**FIGURE 6.6:** TRUST IN NEWS BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION (%)




[Q1F] Some people talk about 'left', 'right' and 'centre' to describe parties and politicians. (Generally, socialist parties would be considered 'left wing' whilst conservative parties would be considered 'right wing'). With this in mind, where would you place yourself on the following scale? [Base: N=2,034]

**FIGURE 6.7:** TRUST IN NEWS BY NUMBER OF NEWS SOURCES (%)




[Q3] Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news? Please select all that apply. [Base: N=1,909] *From the 10 options we counted the number of news sources.

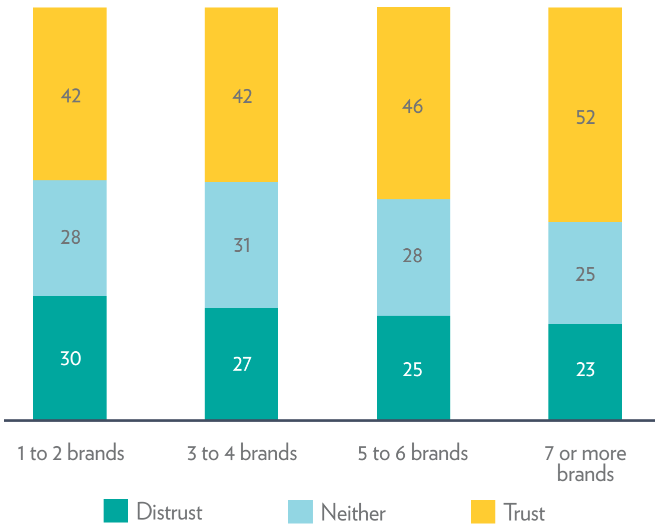
## MORE NEWS BRANDS EQUATES TO HIGHER TRUST

The more news brands Australians access, the higher their trust in news. Among those who haven't used any news brands in the past week, only 14% say they trust news generally, compared to 52% of those who used 7 or more news brands (see **figure 6.8**).

## ABC AND SBS CONTINUE TO BE THE MOST TRUSTED NEWS BRANDS

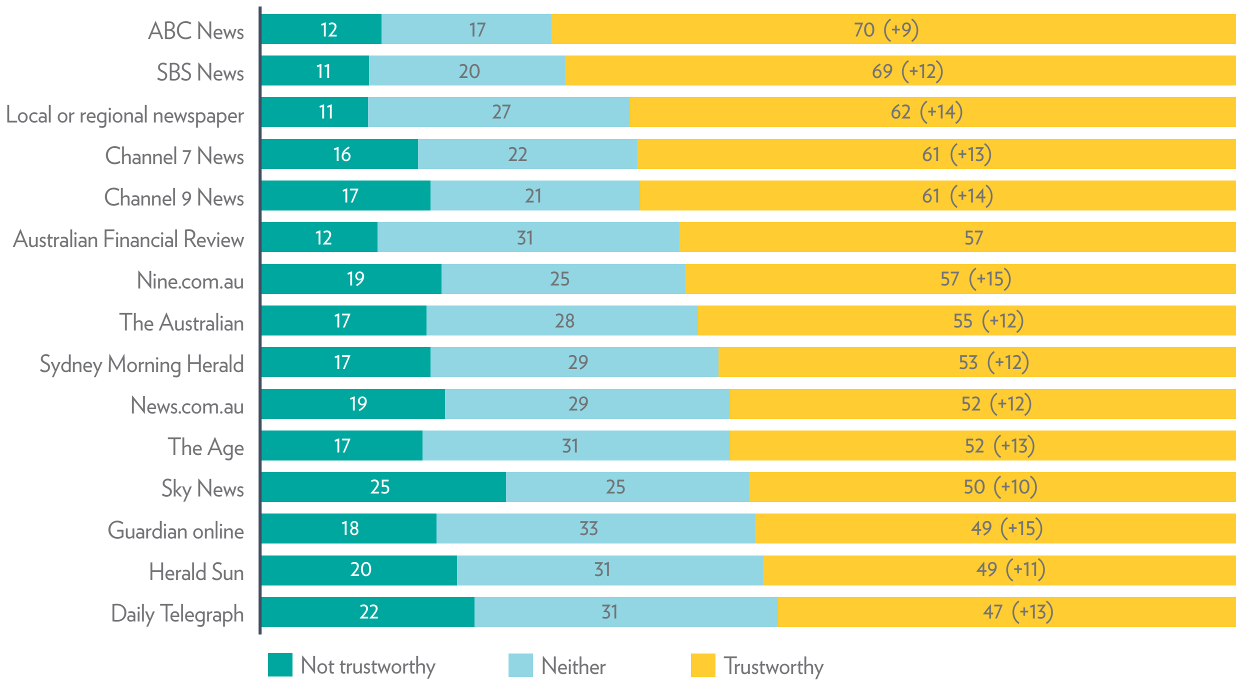
Australia's public broadcasters are the most trusted news brands in the survey. Of the 15 brands included in the question, the ABC remains the most trusted (70%), followed closely by the SBS (69%). *The Australian Financial Review*, included for the first time in this survey, is the most trusted national newspaper, and *The Daily Telegraph* continues to be the least trusted news brand among the 15 titles[3] (see **figure 6.9**).

**FIGURE 6.8:** TRUST IN NEWS BY NUMBER OF NEWS BRANDS (%)




**[Q5a]** Which of the following brands have you used to access news in the last week (via TV, radio or print only)? Please select all that apply. **[Q5b]** Which of the following brands have you used to access news in the last week (via websites, apps, social media, and other forms of Internet access)? Please select all that apply. * From the 58 options we counted the number of brands. [Base: N=2,034].

**FIGURE 6.9:** TRUST IN NEWS BRANDS (%)




**Q6_2018_trust]** How trustworthy would you say news from the following brands is? Please use the scale below, where 0 is 'not at all trustworthy' and 10 is 'completely trustworthy'. 0-4: Not trustworthy; 5=Neither; 6-10=Trustworthy. [Base: N=2,034]

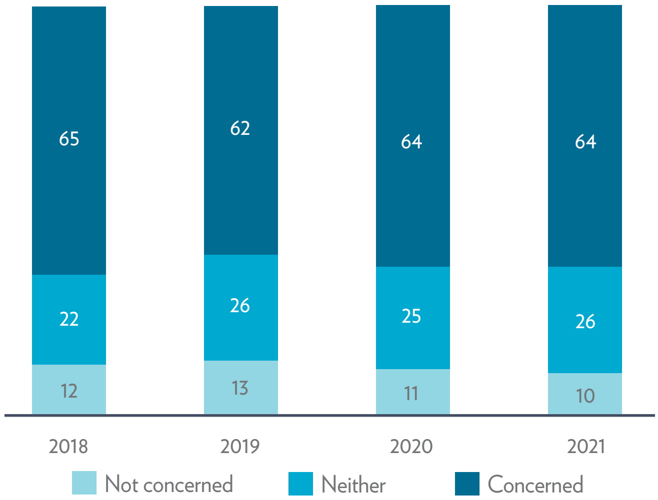
[3] Please note, not all news brands are able to be included in this question.

## CONCERN ABOUT MISINFORMATION REMAINS HIGH, BUT STEADY

Almost two-thirds of Australians (64%) say they are concerned about misinformation. This is the same proportion as last year. Compared to consumers in many other countries, the level of concern in Australia is higher (see **Chapter 9**) but has remained relatively steady since 2018 (see **figure 6.10**).


**Two-thirds of Australians**
**are concerned about false and misleading information in online news**

**FIGURE 6.10:** CONCERN ABOUT MISINFORMATION 2018-2021 (%)

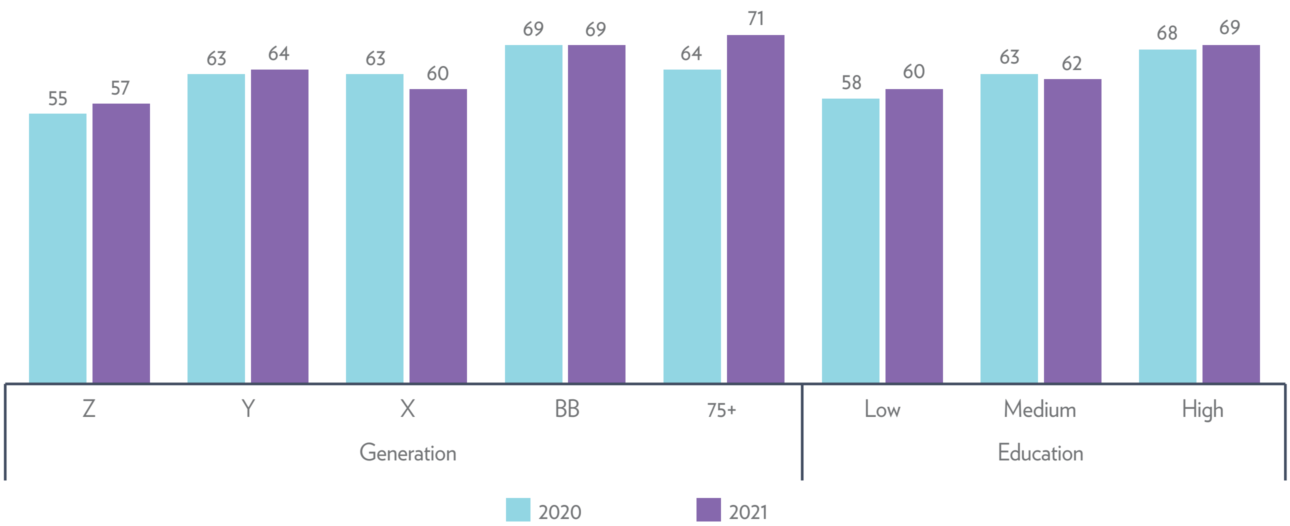



[Q_FAKE_NEWS_1] Thinking about online news, I am concerned about what is real and what is fake on the internet. Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree. [N=2,034].

## INCREASE IN CONCERN ABOUT MISINFORMATION AMONG 75+

Australians aged 75+ have become more concerned about misinformation over the past 12 months. In 2020, 64% of consumers aged 75+ said they were worried about it, compared to 71% in 2021. There was little change across other generations. Education is related to the level of concern. Those with high levels of education tend to be more concerned about misinformation. This has not changed since last year (see **figure 6.11**).

**FIGURE 6.11:** CONCERN ABOUT MISINFORMATION BY DEMOGRAPHICS (%)

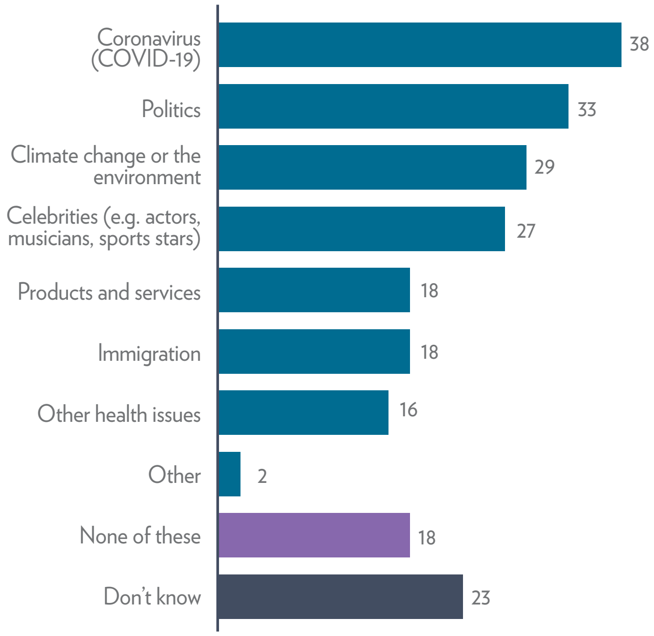


## COVID-19 MISINFORMATION IS ENCOUNTERED THE MOST

We asked consumers if they had seen false or misleading information about 8 different topics. More than half (59%) of Australians encountered misinformation in the last week. Thirty-eight per cent of Australian consumers say they have experienced misinformation about COVID-19 in the past seven days. One-third say they have come across political misinformation, and 29% say they have encountered misinformation about climate change. Nearly one-quarter of consumers do not know if they have encountered misinformation (23%), and 18% say they have not experienced misinformation about any of the topics listed in the past week (see **figure 6.12**).

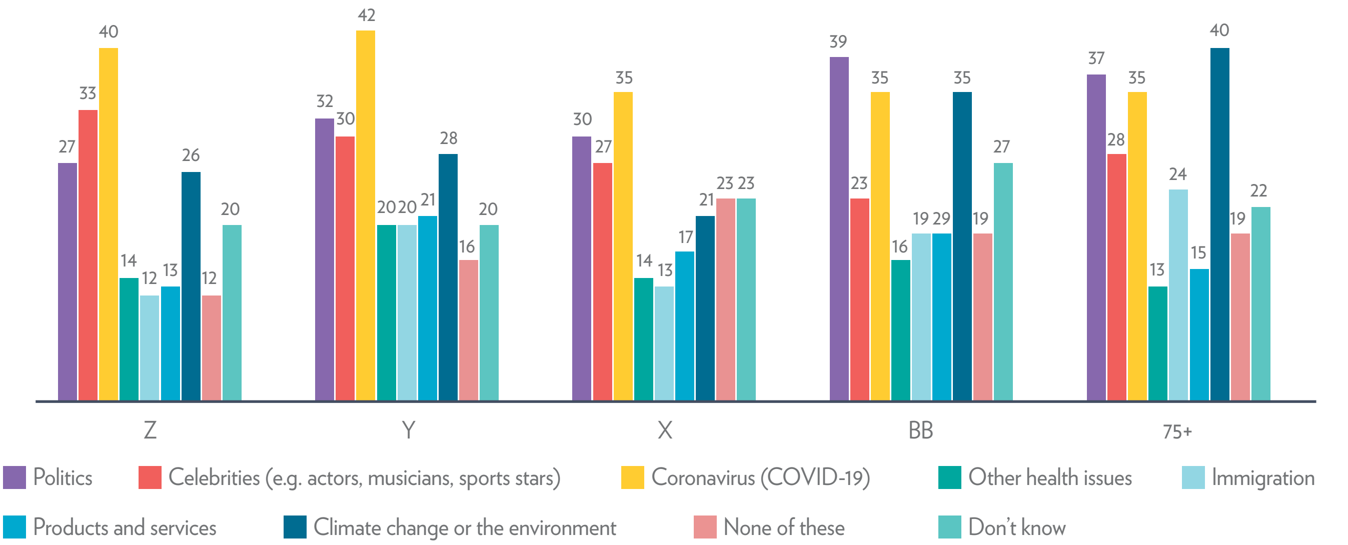
Experiences of misinformation vary between generations. Gen Z is most likely to encounter misinformation about the pandemic (40%), followed by celebrities and influencers (33%), whereas those aged 75+ are most likely to experience misinformation about climate change (40%) and politics (37%). In contrast, Baby Boomers say they are most likely to come across misinformation about politics (39%) followed by COVID-19 and climate change (35%) (see **figure 6.13**).

**FIGURE 6.12:** EXPERIENCE OF MISINFORMATION TOPICS (%)




[Q_FAKE_NEWS_2021a] Have you seen false or misleading information about any of the following topics, in the last week? [Base: N=2,034].

**FIGURE 6.13:** EXPERIENCE OF MISINFORMATION TOPICS BY GENERATION (%)

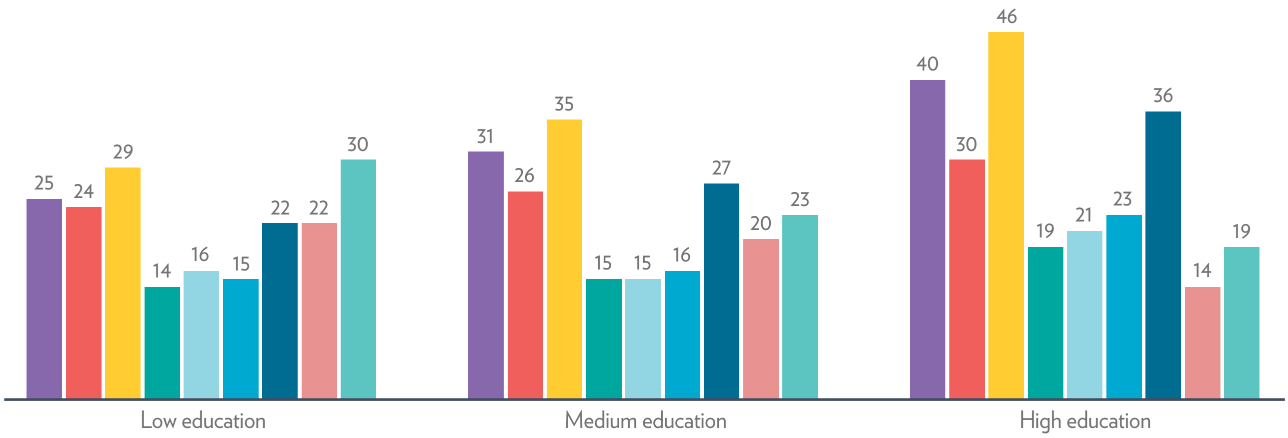



[Base: N=2,034]

## LOW EDUCATED ARE LESS LIKELY TO KNOW IF THEY HAVE ENCOUNTERED MISINFORMATION

Australian news consumers with low educational attainment are the least likely to know if they have encountered misinformation or not. Thirty percent of those with low levels of education say they do not know if they have experienced misinformation in the past week, compared to 14% of news consumers with high education. Further, 46% of news consumers with high education say they have encountered misinformation about COVID-19 compared to 29% of those with low levels of education. This highlights that news consumers with lower education are less aware of misinformation and if they have encountered it (see **figure 6.14**).

**FIGURE 6.14:** EXPERIENCE OF MISINFORMATION TOPICS BY EDUCATION (%)

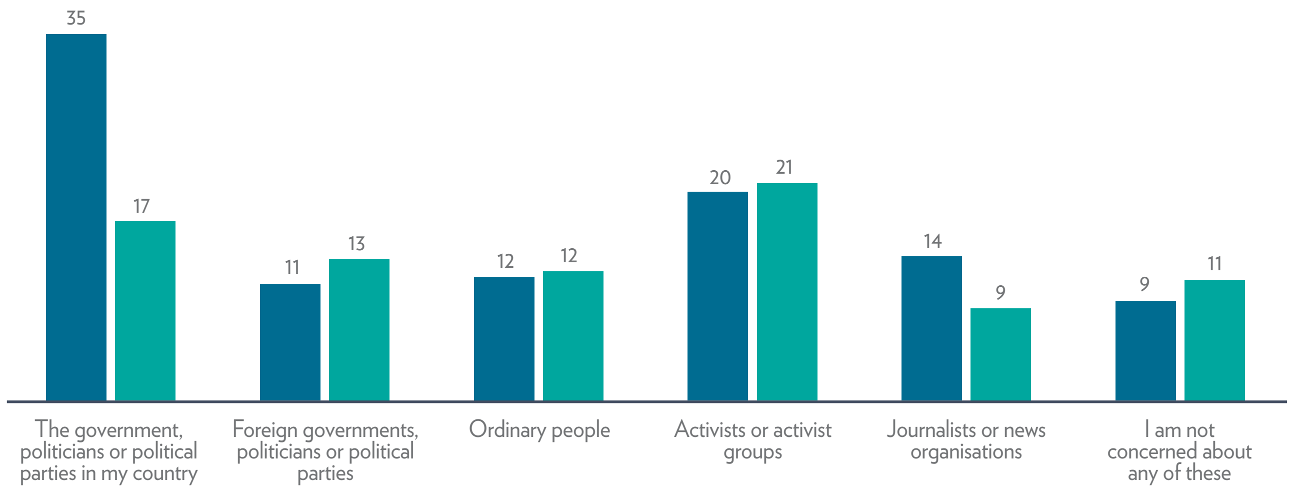



[Base: N=2,034]

## AUSTRALIANS ARE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT COVID-19 MISINFORMATION FROM ACTIVIST GROUPS

In 2020, we asked consumers about possible sources of misinformation and which ones they were most concerned about. This year, we specifically asked about Australian's attitudes to COVID-19 misinformation. The data point to a difference in attitude depending on the source of misinformation. In 2020, survey participants were most concerned about Australian governments and politicians being sources of general misinformation (35%), followed by activists or activist groups (20%). In 2021, concern about governments and politicians being the source of COVID-19 misinformation specifically, is significantly lower (17%). A similar pattern can be seen for journalists and news organisations. In 2020, 14% were concerned about reporters and news outlets being sources of general misinformation, compared to 9% about the coronavirus pandemic specifically in 2021. In contrast, the level of concern about activists and activist groups has hardly changed (21%, +1), but they are seen as the most likely source of misinformation about COVID-19, ahead of governments and news organisations in 2021.

**FIGURE 6.15:** CONCERN ABOUT MISINFORMATION SOURCES 2020, CONCERN ABOUT COVID-19 MISINFORMATION SOURCES 2021 (%)

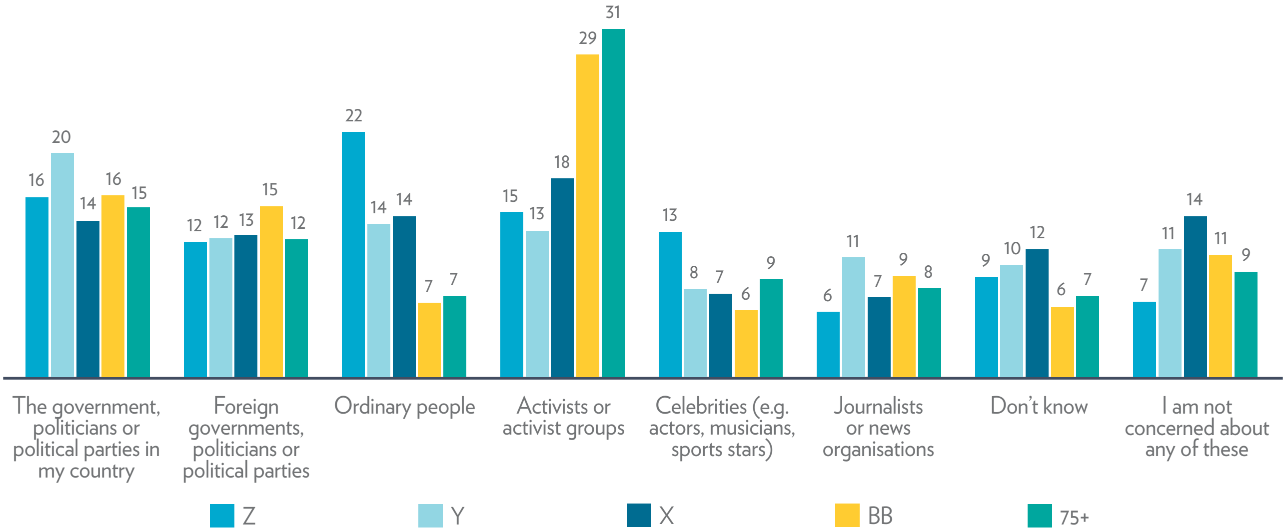



[Q_FAKE_NEWS_2021b] Thinking specifically about coronavirus (COVID-19) and its effects, which of the following sources, if any, are you most concerned about online? Please select one. [Base: N=2,034].
[Q_FAKE_NEWS_2020b] Which of the following, if any, are you most concerned about online? Please select one. [Base: N=2,131]

## GEN Z MOST CONCERNED ABOUT ORDINARY PEOPLE BEING A SOURCE OF COVID-19 MISINFORMATION

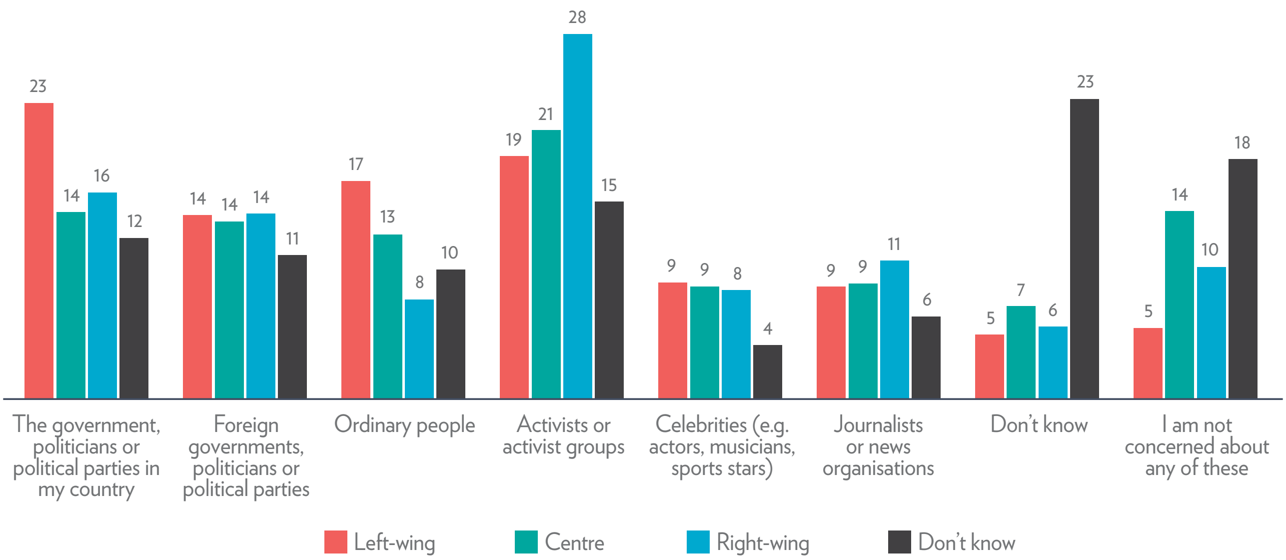
Each generation is concerned about different sources of COVID-19 misinformation. As **figure 6.16** shows, Gen Zs are most worried about COVID-19 misinformation being spread by ordinary people, whereas Gen Ys are more concerned about the misinformation coming from the government or politicians. Gen Xs are the most likely not to be concerned about any sources of COVID-19 misinformation, while Baby Boomers and 75+ are both most worried about COVID-19 misinformation coming from activists or activist groups.

**FIGURE 6.16:** CONCERN ABOUT COVID-19 MISINFORMATION FROM SOURCES BY GENERATION (%)




Right-wing news consumers are more concerned about misinformation about COVID-19 coming from activists and activist groups (28%), but this is lower than the concern about these actors as general sources of misinformation (38%) in last year's survey. Similarly, left-wing oriented news consumers are more concerned about the government and politicians being the source of COVID-19 misinformation (23%), which is much lower than concerns about the political class being a general source of misinformation in 2020 (45%). This difference is possibly due to governments relying on, and relaying, expert health advice during the pandemic (see **figure 6.17**).

**FIGURE 6.17:** CONCERN ABOUT COVID-19 MISINFORMATION FROM SOURCES BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION (%)




[Base: N=2,034]

## CONCERN ABOUT NEWS WEBSITES & APPS AS SOURCES OF COVID-19 MISINFORMATION IS LOWER THAN IN 2020

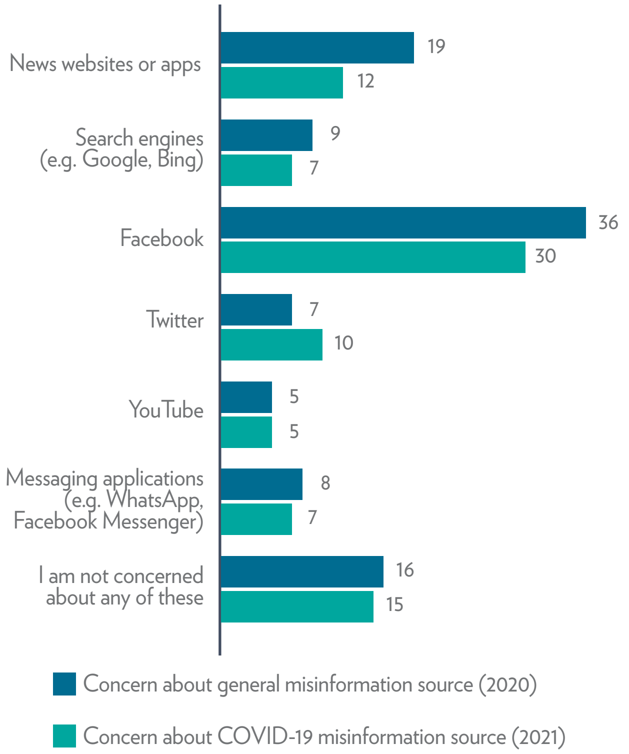
Facebook is ranked the top platform for misinformation about COVID-19 that Australian news consumers are concerned about (30%), followed by news websites and apps (12%).

The data signals a difference in the level of concern about sources of general misinformation and that about COVID-19. In 2020, 36% of Australians said they were concerned about Facebook as a source of misinformation generally, and in 2021 30% were worried about it being a source of misinformation about COVID-19 specifically (see **figure 6.18**). This possibly reflects efforts by Facebook to tackle COVID-19 misinformation and to promote official health information.

There was a similar pattern in people's concern about news websites and apps. In 2020, 19% of Australians said they were concerned about news websites and apps being a source of general misinformation. In 2021, only 12% of news consumers say they are concerned about news websites and apps being a source of COVID-19 misinformation specifically.

This is good news for journalism. Combined with an increase in trust, the data points to an improvement in audience perceptions of news credibility generally, and in relation to COVID-19 coverage specifically.

**FIGURE 6.18:** CONCERN ABOUT GENERAL MISINFORMATION VS CONCERN ABOUT COVID-19 MISINFORMATION FROM PLATFORMS (%)




## SUMMARY

After years of concern about declining trust in news and fears around misinformation, this year's report contains some glimmers of light. It shows that trust in news has risen over the past twelve months (43%), rebounding off the back of a peak in trust associated with news reporting about COVID-19. While the height of 53% recorded in April 2020 has not been maintained, trust did not drop to the pre-COVID low (38%), indicating an overall increase.

Further, the data show that concern about journalism as a source of misinformation about COVID-19 is very low (9%). In 2018, we asked about 'fake news' and 63% of news consumers said they were concerned about poor quality journalism as a source of 'fake news', and 40% said they had encountered it. This signals a possible positive shift in perception of journalism after 12 months of reporting expert health advice about the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data also highlight ongoing low levels of trust in news found on social media (18%) compared to trust in news generally. Given much of the news encountered on digital platforms is the same as that which appears on the home pages and front pages of well-respected news brands, the findings suggest that the nature of the online environment itself is one the factors lowering perceptions of trust, rather than the news content. This is an area that needs further examination, but it is also a possible explanation that is gaining support.[4]

Lastly, the differences between high and low educated Australian consumers in relation to concern about COVID-19 misinformation and their ability to discern it, points to an ongoing need to boost media and information literacy among socio-economically disadvantaged groups in Australia.

[4] Toff et al (2021) *Listening to what trust in news means to users: qualitative evidence from four countries.* Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/listening-what-trust-news-means-users-qualitative-evidence-four-countries?s=09

# COMMENTARY

## BUILDING TRUST AND COMBATTING MISINFORMATION IN A CRISIS

**Creina Chapman**, Deputy Chair, Australian Communications and Media Authority

Crises have a way of bringing people together. During such times, the public relies on authoritative sources of news and information to keep them safe, informed and working together. This role is met by both public institutions and news organisations.

Not surprisingly, the *Digital News Report: Australia 2021* has found that trust in news reporting about the COVID-19 pandemic translated to an increase in trust for news more generally. While down from its peak during the early stages of COVID-19, trust in the news is still up from its pre-COVID low at the beginning of 2020. It may be too early to tell how this will trend in the future, but the reliance on trusted voices gained during the pandemic is an opportunity for news organisations to reset and rebuild their relationships with the audience after a tumultuous few years.

**It is telling that higher levels of trust correlate to higher levels of news consumption, and in particular, the number of sources of news accessed by Australians.**

Persistently, trust in news found on social media (18%) remains very low. However, with around half of Australians regularly accessing news on social media and almost a quarter of Australians relying on social media as their primary source of news, it is clear that digital platforms continue to play a significant role in the Australian news ecosystem.

This comes with a range of issues. In the context of online news, nearly two-thirds of Australians remain concerned about what is real and fake on the internet. And a variety of surveys over the past 12 months have shown a concerning portion of the population believe dangerous falsehoods about COVID-19 that have been circulating online.[1]

Any lack of trust in authoritative or reliable sources of news and information is particularly worrisome during a global pandemic, as it may drive people to spaces where misinformation is more prevalent. This, in turn, increases exposure to false conspiratorial narratives that can result in real-world harm to both individual users and broader societal institutions.

Since the last DNR Australia, we have seen an increased awareness of the size, scope and potential harms arising from online conspiratorial communities, often made up of ordinary users, peddling harmful false content. As platforms have begun strengthening their misinformation policies and enforcement activities, communities have begun shifting to alternative online spaces and malicious actors have got better at hiding their tracks from content moderation tools.

But this is not just about the current health crises. As we have seen overseas, online mis- and disinformation campaigns can also do significant harm by undermining trust in democratic processes. The riots on the US Capitol earlier this year, fuelled by the #stopthesteal campaign, show what can happen when harmful false narratives are widely propagated online.

While platforms have made significant strides to address harmful mis- and disinformation over the last year, particularly in the context of COVID-19, the research results highlight the need for greater transparency and consistency from platforms on content moderation issues.

Longstanding concerns about this has led to government action. In December 2019, the government asked digital platforms to develop a voluntary code to address disinformation and news quality. The code would set out practical policies and actions to tackle the problems while preserving individuals' rights to privacy and protecting freedom of expression.

For the last 18 months, the ACMA has overseen the work of platforms and their representative, DIGI, as they have developed a voluntary Australian code. The code launched in February 2021 and has since been adopted by Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Twitter, TikTok and Redbubble, Adobe and Apple.

[1] See, for example, https://essentialvision.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Essential-Report-180520-1.pdf

**By signing up to the code, the signatories have committed to provide safeguards against harms that may arise from the propagation of disinformation and misinformation on their platforms.**

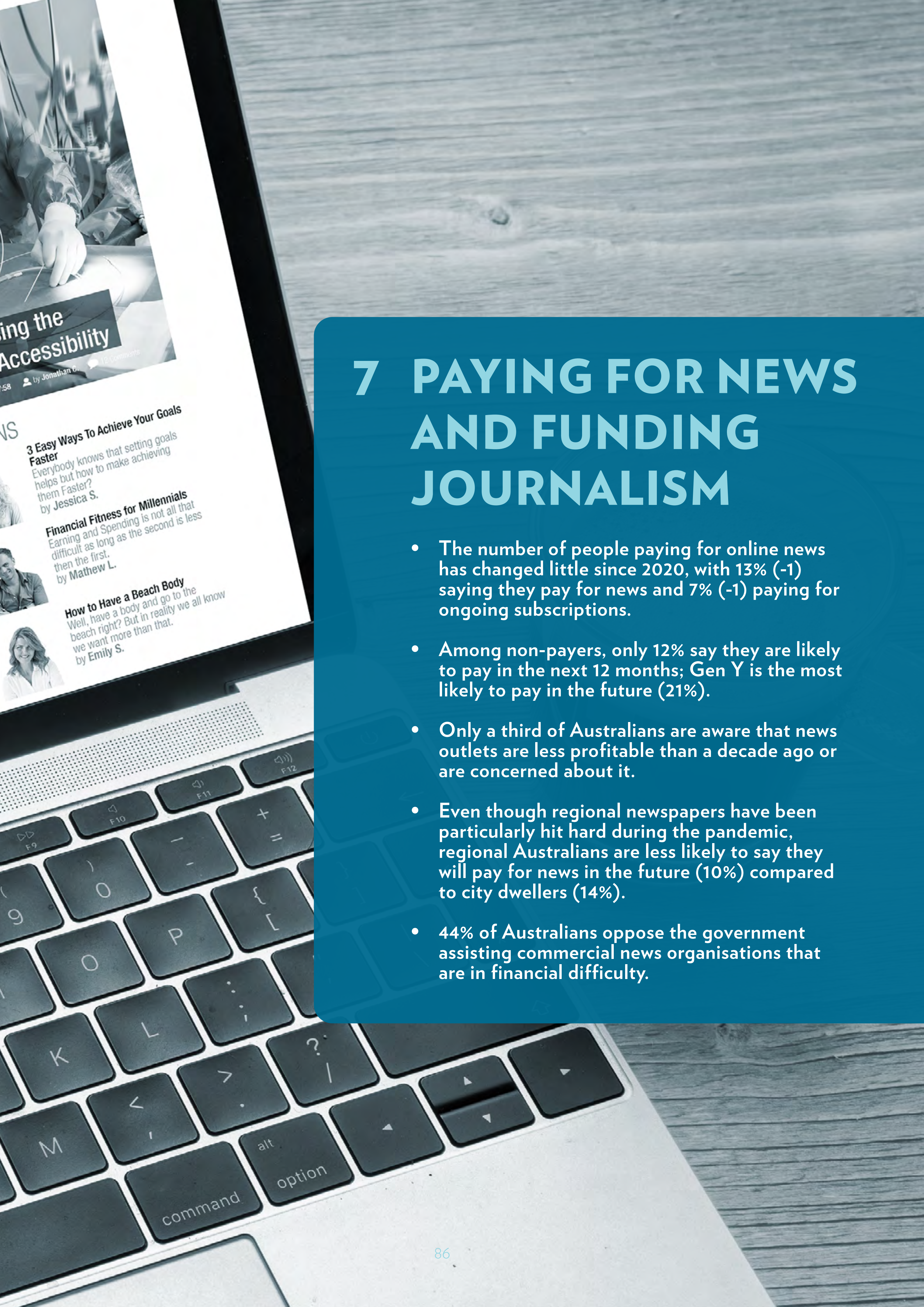
Code signatories may also opt into other objectives in the code including disrupting advertising and monetisation incentives for disinformation, helping consumers to make better choices about the source of news and factual content, helping consumers to identify misinformation, and improving transparency of political advertising.

The ACMA will shortly report to government on the process of developing the code, the code itself, the initial reports of signatories, and the state of online mis- and disinformation in Australia more generally. The government will use this report to inform its assessment of the effectiveness of the voluntary code and to consider whether further steps will be required.

The process has started, and now the key issue for the second half of the year and going forward is what next?

The initial code is a good foundation to build upon and improve over time, particularly through detailed reporting of actions taken and results. It is due to be reviewed after 12 months of operation and there is still work yet to be done on finalising key aspects of code administration. The code anticipates a mechanism to resolve complaints made under the code, setting up a committee with signatories and independent members to monitor the actions of signatories, and further work with independent researchers to improve public understanding of disinformation and misinformation.

And while the code is a valuable initiative, it is important to recognise that tackling disinformation and misinformation is complex and won't be solved by platforms alone. Responsibility must be shared across governments, digital platforms, users, news media and society to make sure Australians can access accurate and reliable news and information online, while ensuring rights to freedom of expression are protected.




# 7 PAYING FOR NEWS AND FUNDING JOURNALISM

- The number of people paying for online news has changed little since 2020, with 13% (-1) saying they pay for news and 7% (-1) paying for ongoing subscriptions.
- Among non-payers, only 12% say they are likely to pay in the next 12 months; Gen Y is the most likely to pay in the future (21%).
- Only a third of Australians are aware that news outlets are less profitable than a decade ago or are concerned about it.
- Even though regional newspapers have been particularly hit hard during the pandemic, regional Australians are less likely to say they will pay for news in the future (10%) compared to city dwellers (14%).
- 44% of Australians oppose the government assisting commercial news organisations that are in financial difficulty.

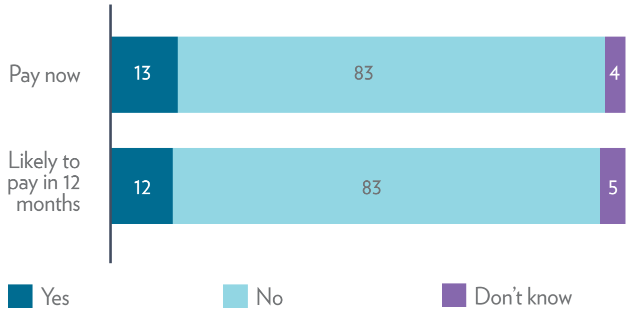
## MOST AUSTRALIANS DON'T PAY FOR NEWS, NOR DO THEY INTEND TO

In the past few years, there has been a steady increase in the number of news consumers paying for online news. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic this number did not increase with only 13% of Australian news consumers paying for news[1]. The number of news consumers paying for online news increased by 4 percentage points from 2016 to 2021. The figure was 14% in 2020.

We asked those who currently do not pay for news, how likely they are to pay for news in the next 12 months. The vast majority say it is unlikely they will pay for news (83%), with only 12% saying they are planning to pay. A small percentage of people (5%) are not sure (**figure 7.1**).

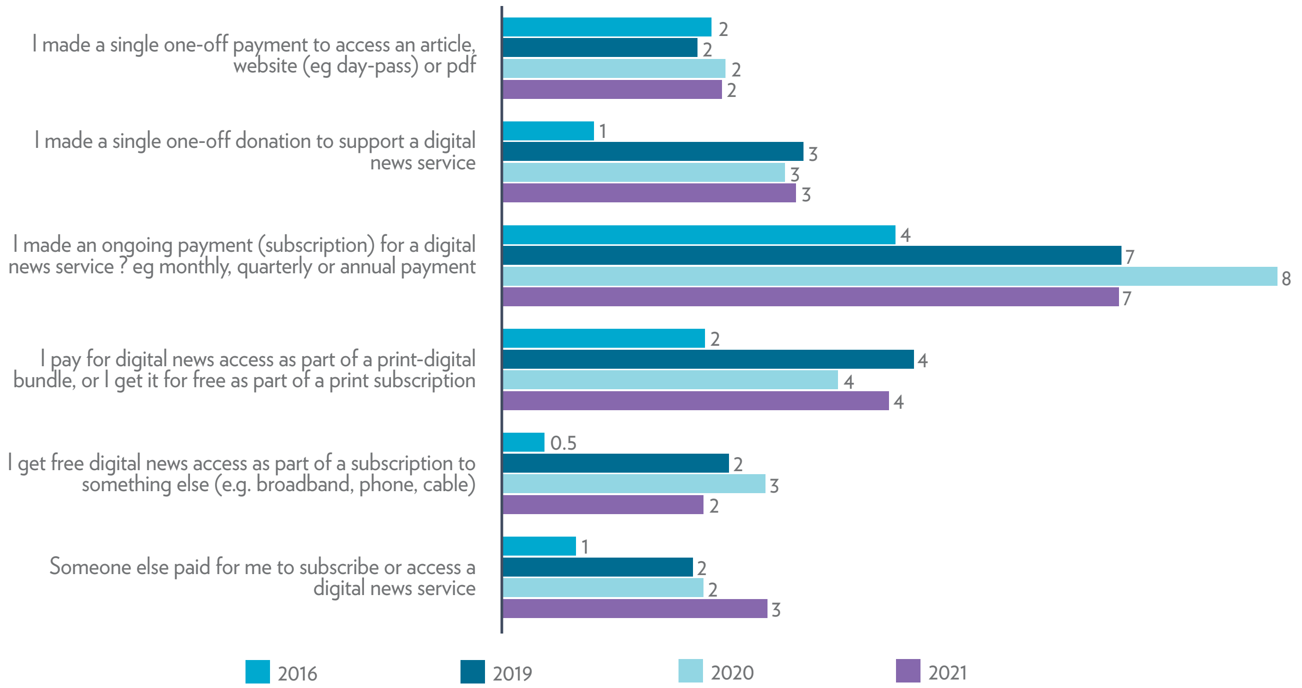
Ongoing subscription is the most common way of paying for a news service online (7%) followed by 'as part of a print-digital bundle' (4%). Subscription overall has grown by 3 percentage points since 2016. Donation, while still a small figure (3%), has increased three-fold over the same period (see **figure 7.2**). There has been no change since 2020 in the number of subscriptions people are signed up for, with 52% saying they pay for a single news service and 44% saying they pay for two or more.

**FIGURE 7.1:** PAYING FOR NEWS (%)




**[Q7a]** Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service in the last year? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription, a donation, or one-off payment for an article or app or e-edition). [Base: N=2,034]. **[Q7aiv_rc]** You said you have not paid for online news content in the last year... How likely or unlikely would you be to pay in the next 12 months for online news from particular sources that you like? How likely or unlikely would you be to pay in the next 12 months for online news from particular sources that you like? Very unlikely, somewhat unlikely, somewhat likely, very likely, don't know. [Base: N=1,692].

**FIGURE 7.2:** TYPES OF NEWS PAYMENT 2016-2021 (%)




**[Q7ai]** You said you have accessed paid for ONLINE news content in the last year. Which, if any, of the following ways have you used to pay for ONLINE news content in the last year? Please select all that apply. [Base: N= 2,034].

[1] This year we included those who do not consume news in the survey (see methodology for details). If we exclude these extremely low/non news consumers, the pay figure is 14%, the willingness to pay in the future 13%, and ongoing subscription 7%.

Across 20 countries where news outlets have been actively pushing digital subscriptions, an average of 17% of news consumers are paying for online news. That is an increase by 2 percentage points since last year. Australia has not followed suit (see **figure 7.3**).

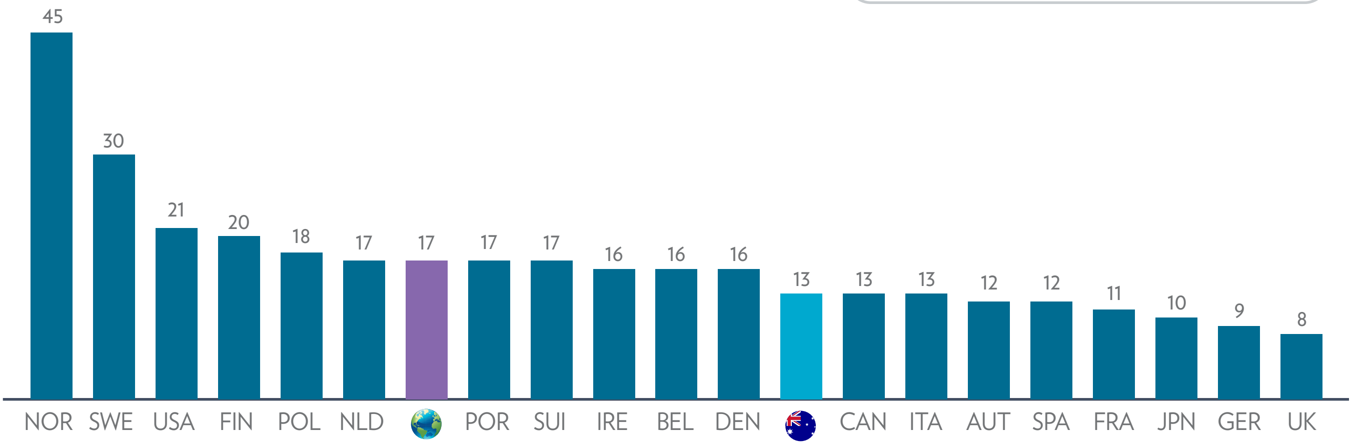
**Paying for news:**

Norway **45%**

Australia **13%**

UK **8%**

**FIGURE 7.3:** PAYING FOR NEWS IN 20 COUNTRIES (%)




The global average was based on 20 countries.

## MORE THAN HALF OF PAYING NEWS CONSUMERS SUBSCRIBE TO ONLY ONE SERVICE

Of those who do pay, about half subscribe to one service (52%), 23% subscribe to 2 services, 12% subscribe to 3 services, and 8% subscribe to 4 or more services. The majority (86%) pay for 3 or fewer news services. Four percent of those who do pay for news, pay for something other than an ongoing subscription. This may include donation, a one-off payment, or someone else paying.

## YOUNGER PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO PAY IN THE FUTURE

Younger generations are more likely to pay for news now and in the future. Gen Y consumers are more likely to pay for news (16%) than other generations. They are also most likely to pay in the future (21%). Among those who currently do not pay, men (14%) are more likely than women (11%) to say they will pay in the future (see **figure 7.4**).

**FIGURE 7.4:** PAYING FOR ONLINE NEWS BY GENDER AND AGE (%)

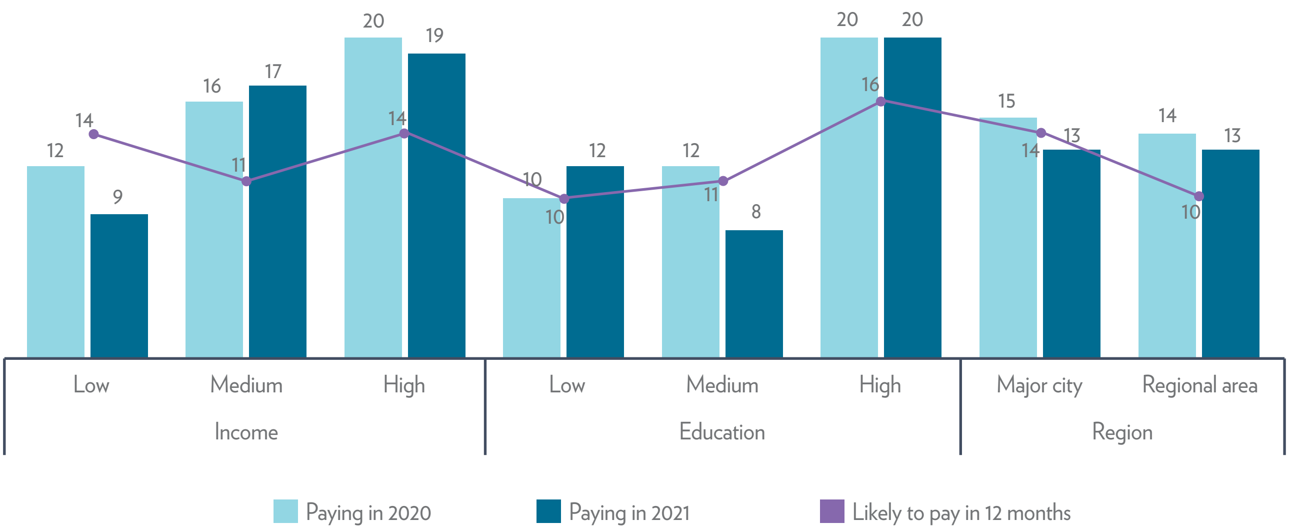
## FEWER LOW INCOME EARNERS PAY FOR NEWS

High income earners and those who have high education are more likely to pay for news. Both low and high income earners (14%) are more likely to say they will pay in the future compared to medium income earners (11%). Those with high education are more likely to be paying now as well as in the future compared to those with medium or low education. There was a drop in the proportion of those on low incomes paying for news and also those with medium education (see **figure 7.5**).

## REGIONAL CONSUMERS ARE LESS LIKELY TO PAY IN THE FUTURE

While the current level of payment is similar for city dwellers and regional news consumers, city dwellers (14%) are more likely to say they will pay in the future compared to regional news consumers (10%).

**FIGURE 7.5:** PAYING FOR ONLINE NEWS BY INCOME, EDUCATION AND REGION (%)




## THOSE WHO FEEL ATTACHED TO THE COMMUNITY ARE MORE WILLING TO PAY FOR NEWS

Those who feel attached to the people who live in their city, district, town or village are more likely to be paying for online news (18%) compared to only 8% of those who say they are not attached. Attachment is also associated with the likelihood of paying for news in the future. Those who are attached to their local community say they will pay in the next year (13%), which is slightly higher than those who do not feel attached and say they will pay for news next year (11%).

## AUSTRALIANS' VIEWS ABOUT THE CURRENT FINANCIAL STATE OF THE NEWS INDUSTRY

During the COVID-19 pandemic more than 150 news companies went through redundancies, closures or suspensions. Although it accelerated during the pandemic, this is part on an ongoing issue of financial distress in news industries.

This year we asked questions about consumers' perceptions of the financial state of commercial news organisations, whether they know about it, or think government intervention is needed. Despite the financial difficulties that commercial news organisations are encountering, many Australians are not aware or concerned.

## MANY AUSTRALIANS ARE NOT CONCERNED ABOUT THE FINANCIAL STATE OF COMMERCIAL NEWS

When asked how concerned they are about the financial state of commercial news organisations, only one-third (34%) say they are 'quite' (23%) or 'very' (11%) concerned, and 49% are not concerned. Almost one-fifth (18%) do not know (see **figure 7.6**).

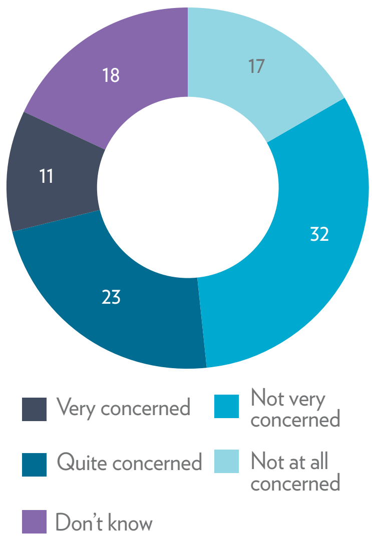
## ONLY ONE-THIRD ARE AWARE THE INDUSTRY IS LESS PROFITABLE

The lack of concern is not surprising as the data show many Australians are not aware that commercial news organisations are financially struggling. Only one-third (34%) are aware that news outlets are less profitable than they were a decade ago (see **figure 7.7**). A small but significant number of news consumers (14%) think news companies are more profitable than they were 10 years ago, and 12% think their profitability is roughly the same. More importantly, a large number of consumers (41%) say they don't know, which indicates that people are not aware. This suggests that Australians have low media literacy, which we have found to be the case in previous research (see *Digital News Report: Australia 2018*).

## LESS THAN A QUARTER OF AUSTRALIANS THINK THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD STEP IN

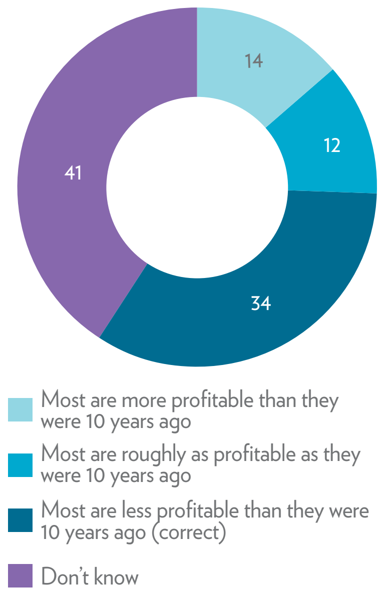
Given the majority of Australians are not aware or concerned about the financial state of commercial news, it is not surprising that many feel the government should not intervene (44%). Less than a quarter (23%) say the government should assist news organisations financially. Almost one-third (32%) did not have a view (see **figure 7.8**).

**FIGURE 7.6:** CONCERN ABOUT FINANCIAL STATE OF COMMERCIAL NEWS (%)



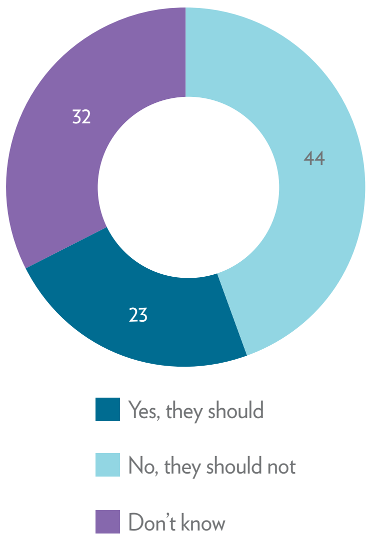

[Financing1_2021] How concerned are you, if at all, about the financial state of commercial news organisations in your country? [Base: N=2,034].

**FIGURE 7.7:** KNOWLEDGE OF FINANCIAL STATE OF COMMERCIAL NEWS (%)




[Financing2_2021] To the best of your knowledge, which of the following best describes the financial state of commercial news organisations in your country? Most are more profitable than they were 10 years ago; Most are roughly as profitable as they were 10 years ago; Most are less profitable than they were 10 years ago (correct); Don't know. [Base: N=2,034].

**FIGURE 7.8:** SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT TO FINANCIALLY ASSIST COMMERCIAL NEWS (%)

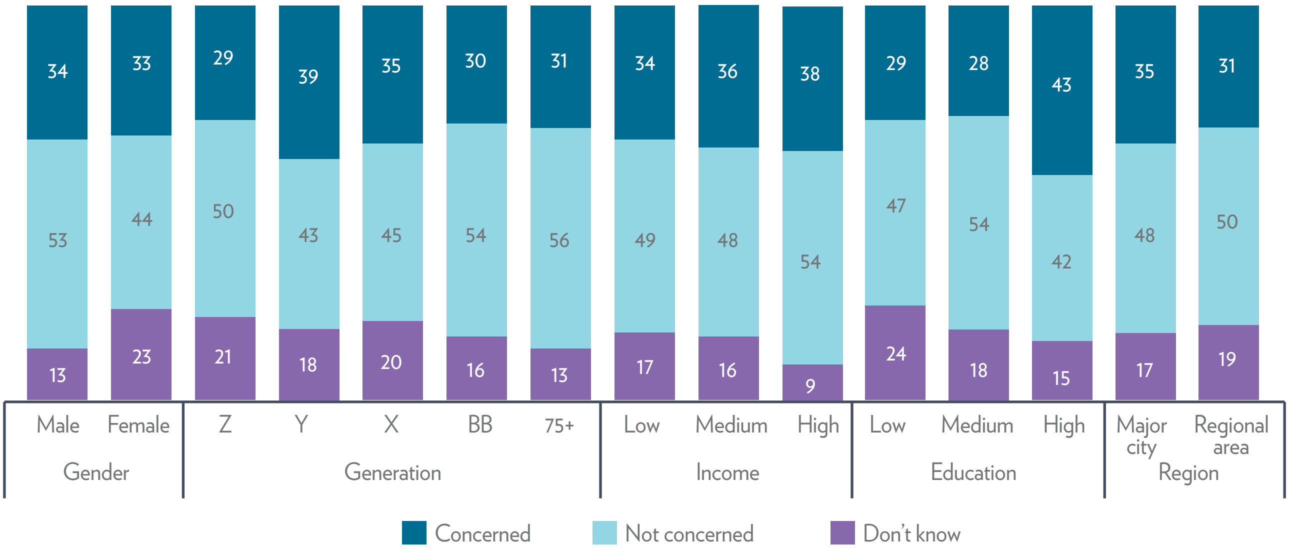



[Financing3_2021] Should the government step in to help commercial news organisations that can't make enough money on their own? No, they should not; Yes, they should; Don't know [Base: N=2,034].

## GEN Y ARE THE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT THE FINANCIAL STATE OF COMMERCIAL NEWS

Gen Y are the most concerned about the state of the news industry (39%) compared to other generations. Gen Z (29%), Baby Boomers (30%) and those 75+ (31%) are comparatively less concerned. Those with high education (43%) are much more concerned than those with medium (28%) or low (29%) levels of education. Despite the closure of many regional newspapers in the past year, those living in the city (35%) are more concerned than consumers in regional areas (31%) (see **figure 7.9**).

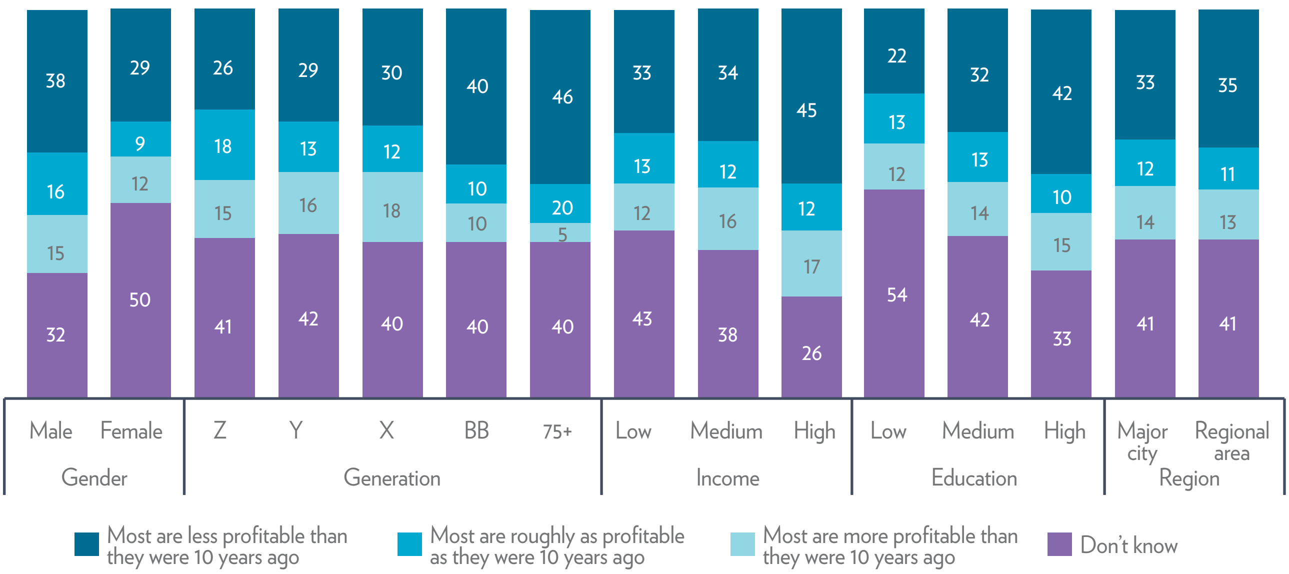
**FIGURE 7.9:** CONCERN ABOUT FINANCIAL STATE OF COMMERCIAL NEWS BY DEMOGRAPHICS (%)




## OLDER GENERATIONS ARE MORE AWARE, BUT LESS CONCERNED

Men (38%) are more aware than women (29%) that news organisations are less profitable compared to a decade ago. Older generations are more aware of the changes with 40% of Baby Boomers and 46% of those aged 75+ knowing that the news industry is financially suffering. Those with a high level of education are also more aware of the financial state of news, but more than half (54%) of people with low education say they don't know (see **figure 7.10**).

**FIGURE 7.10:** KNOWLEDGE OF THE FINANCIAL STATE OF COMMERCIAL NEWS BY DEMOGRAPHICS (%)

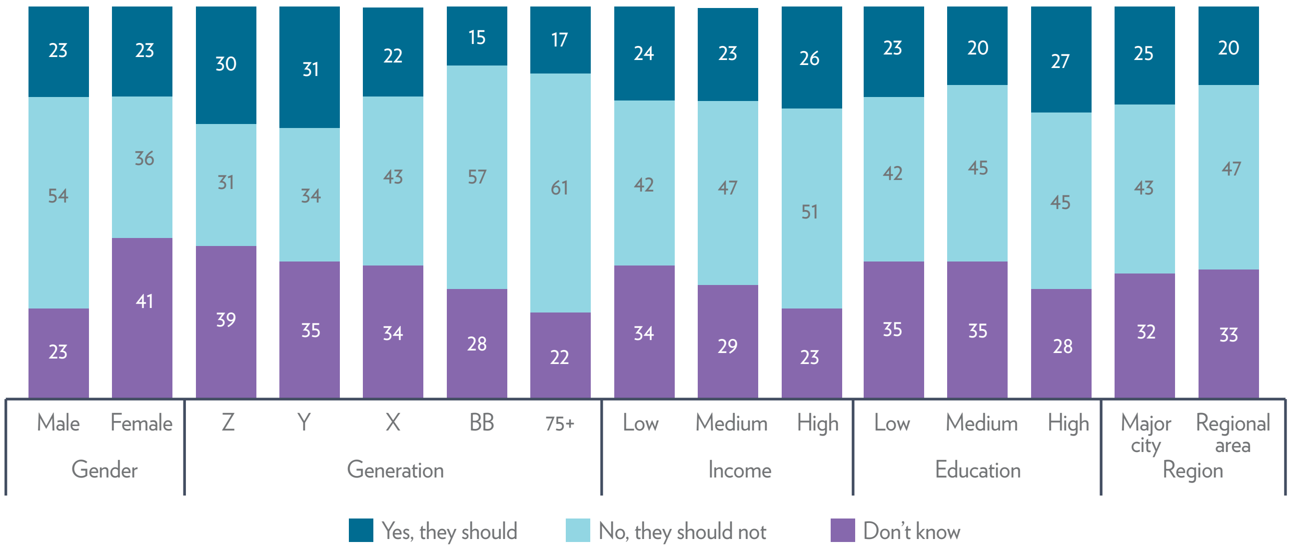



[Financing2_2021] To the best of your knowledge, which of the following best describes the financial state of commercial news organisations in your country? [Base: N=2,032].

## YOUNGER GENERATIONS ARE MORE SUPPORTIVE OF GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

Younger people are in general more supportive of the government stepping in with 30% of Gen Z and 31% of Gen Y expressing support. Women are more likely to not have a view on this matter (41%) than men (23%). Those who have high education (27%), live in the city (25%) and earn high incomes (26%) are more supportive of the government assisting news organisations in financial distress (see **figure 7.11**).

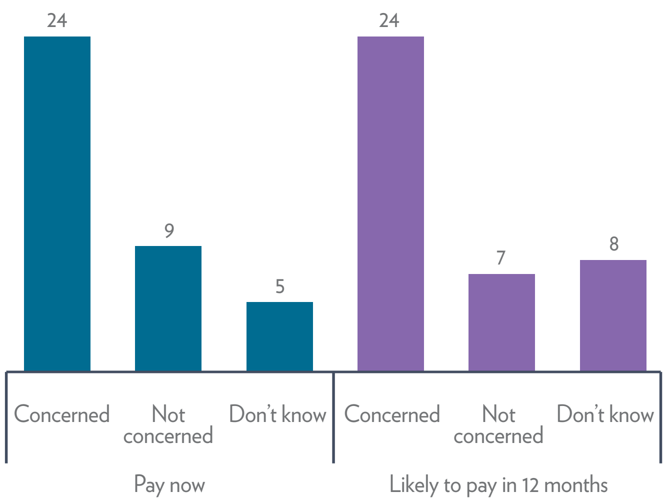
**FIGURE 7.11:** SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT TO FINANCIALLY ASSIST COMMERCIAL NEWS BY DEMOGRAPHICS (%)




## THOSE WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE FINANCIAL STATE OF NEWS ARE MORE LIKELY TO PAY IN THE FUTURE

Awareness of the state of the news industry seems to be related to audiences' willingness to pay for news. Respondents who are concerned about the financial state of commercial news are almost three times as likely to be currently paying for news than those who are not concerned. Among those who currently do not pay, but are concerned about the financial state, 24% say they are likely to pay in 12 months. Those who are not concerned (7%) or say they don't know (8%) are much less likely to say they will pay in the future (see **figure 7.12**).

**FIGURE 7.12:** PAYING FOR NEWS BY CONCERN ABOUT THE FINANCIAL STATE OF COMMERCIAL NEWS (%)

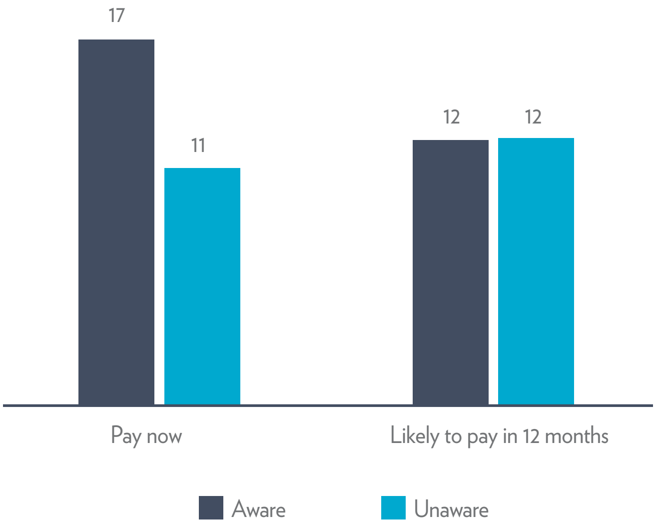


## THOSE WHO ARE AWARE ARE MORE LIKELY TO PAY

We compared those who correctly identified that news organisations are less profitable than 10 years ago, to those who didn't know or chose the wrong answer. Those who are aware of the current state of news industries are more likely to pay for news (17%) compared to those who are unaware (11%). In deciding to pay in the future those who are aware are equally as likely as those who are unaware (12%) to say they might pay in the next 12 months (see **figure 7.13**).

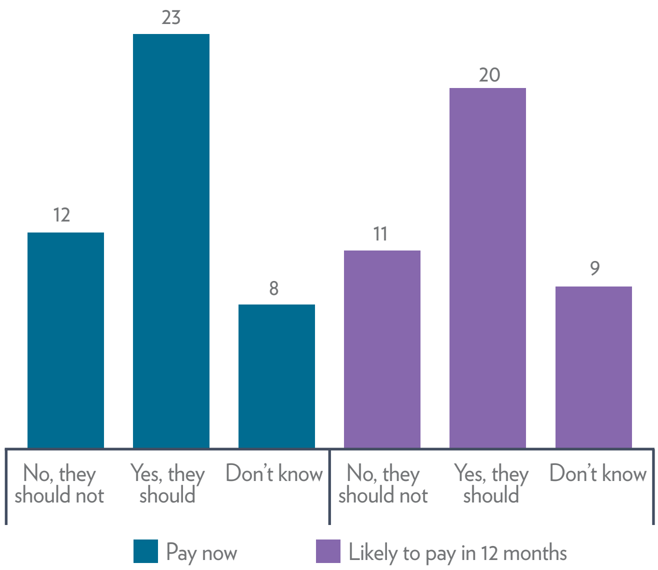
Those who agree that the government should financially support commercial news organisations that are not making enough money are much more likely to pay for news (23%) compared to those who oppose government intervention (12%). Those who say they don't know about the financial difficulties facing the news industry are much less likely to pay for news (8%). The pattern is similar when asked about the willingness to pay in the future with 20% of those who are in favour of government intervention saying they are likely to pay (see **figure 7.14**).

**FIGURE 7.13:** PAYING FOR NEWS BY KNOWLEDGE OF THE FINANCIAL STATE OF COMMERCIAL NEWS (%)




*Aware = Those who correctly answered the question; Unaware = Those who either incorrectly answered or answered 'don't know'

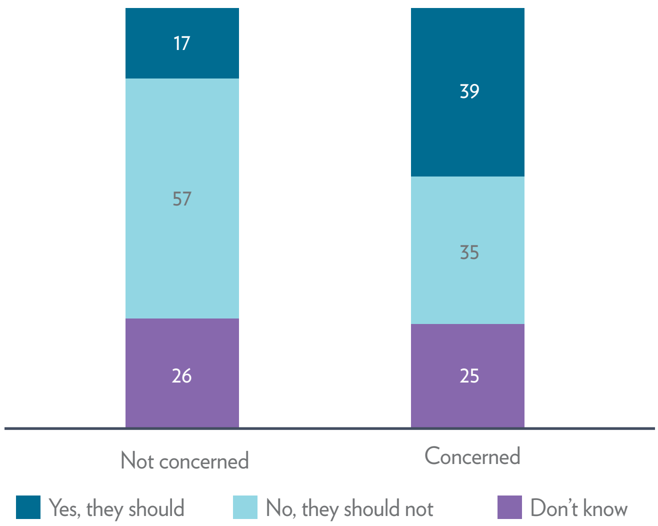
**FIGURE 7.14:** PAYING FOR NEWS BY SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT TO FINANCIALLY ASSIST COMMERCIAL NEWS (%)




## THOSE WHO ARE CONCERNED ARE MORE LIKELY TO SUPPORT GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

Those who are concerned about the financial state of news organisations are much more likely to support government intervention with 39% saying the government should assist commercial news organisations in financial trouble. Only 17% of those who are not concerned are in favour of intervention (see **figure 7.15**).

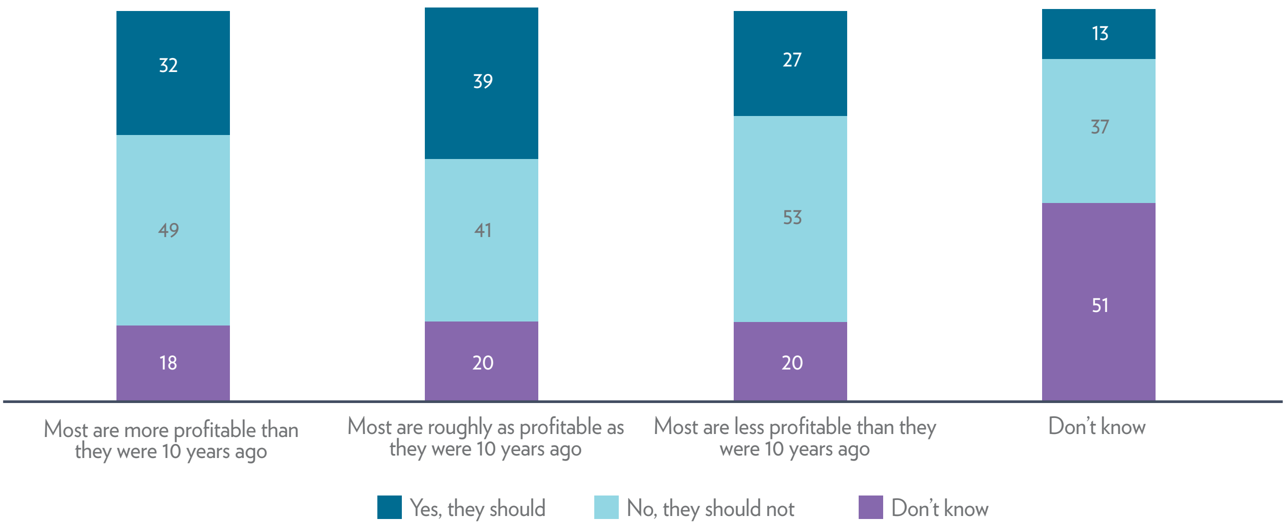
**FIGURE 7.15:** SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT TO FINANCIALLY ASSIST COMMERCIAL NEWS BY CONCERN ABOUT FINANCIAL STATE OF INDUSTRY (%)



## AWARENESS OF THE FINANCIAL STATE OF THE INDUSTRY DOES NOT MEAN SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

However, the data suggest that knowing the commercial news industry is struggling does not translate to support for government interventions. Those who are aware of the current state of commercial news organisations are less likely to think the government should financially assist them (27%) compared to those who think news outlets are more profitable today (32%) or the same as ten years ago (39%). Not surprisingly, those who 'don't know' are the least supportive of government subsidies (13%) (see **figure 7.16**).

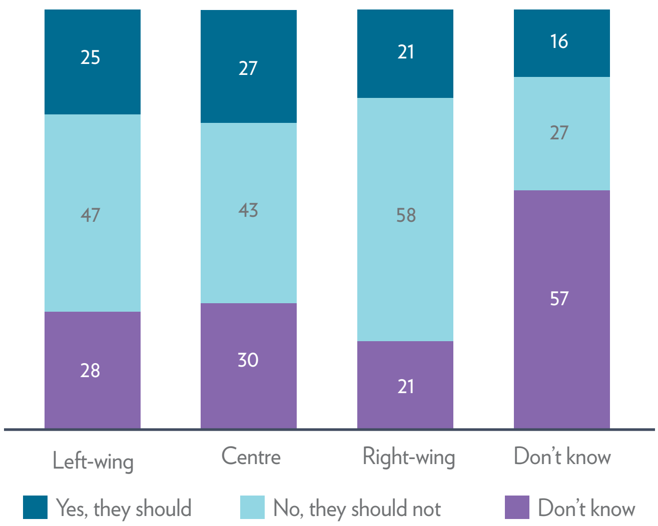
**FIGURE 7.16:** SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT TO FINANCIALLY ASSIST COMMERCIAL NEWS BY KNOWLEDGE OF FINANCIAL STATE OF INDUSTRY (%)




## RIGHT-WING CONSUMERS ARE AGAINST GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE FOR COMMERCIAL NEWS

A quarter of left-wing news consumers and 27% of centre-leaning are supportive of government intervention. However, more than half of right-wing (58%) news consumers are opposed to government assistance for financial struggling news companies. This is consistent with the findings that left-wing news consumers are more likely to say they are concerned about the financial state of news businesses (41%) compared to centre (37%) or right-wing (34%) news consumers. More than half (57%) of those who don't know their political orientation also say they don't know whether the government should step in (see **figure 7.17**).

**FIGURE 7.17:** SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT TO FINANCIALLY ASSIST COMMERCIAL NEWS BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION (%)

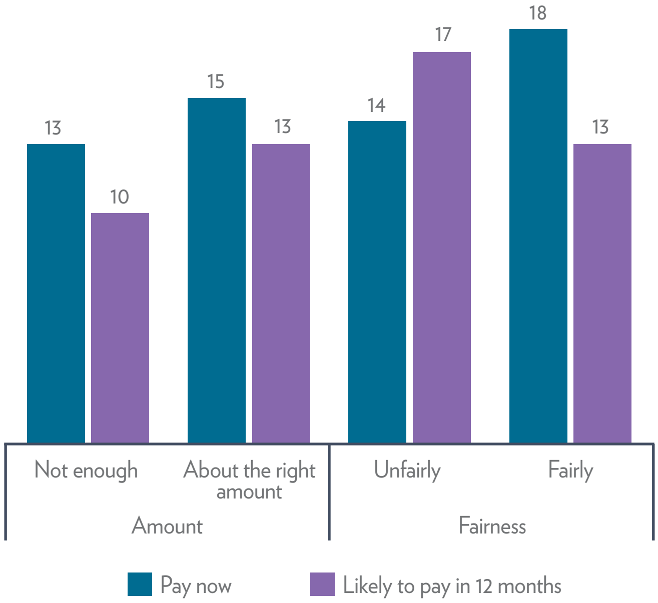



[Q1F] Some people talk about 'left', 'right' and 'centre' to describe parties and politicians. (Generally, socialist parties would be considered 'left wing' whilst conservative parties would be considered 'right wing'). With this in mind, where would you place yourself on the following scale? [Base: N=2,034].

## NEWS CONSUMERS WHO THINK THEIR POLITICAL VIEWS ARE REPRESENTED FAIRLY ARE MORE LIKELY TO PAY FOR ONLINE NEWS

Fairness of coverage of political views rather than amount of coverage seems to be the better predictor of willingness to pay for online news. Among those who say their political views are unfairly represented only 14% pay, compared to 18% of those who say their views are represented fairly (see **figure 7.18**).

**FIGURE 7.18:** PAYING FOR NEWS BY NEWS REPRESENTATION OF POLITICAL VIEWS (%)

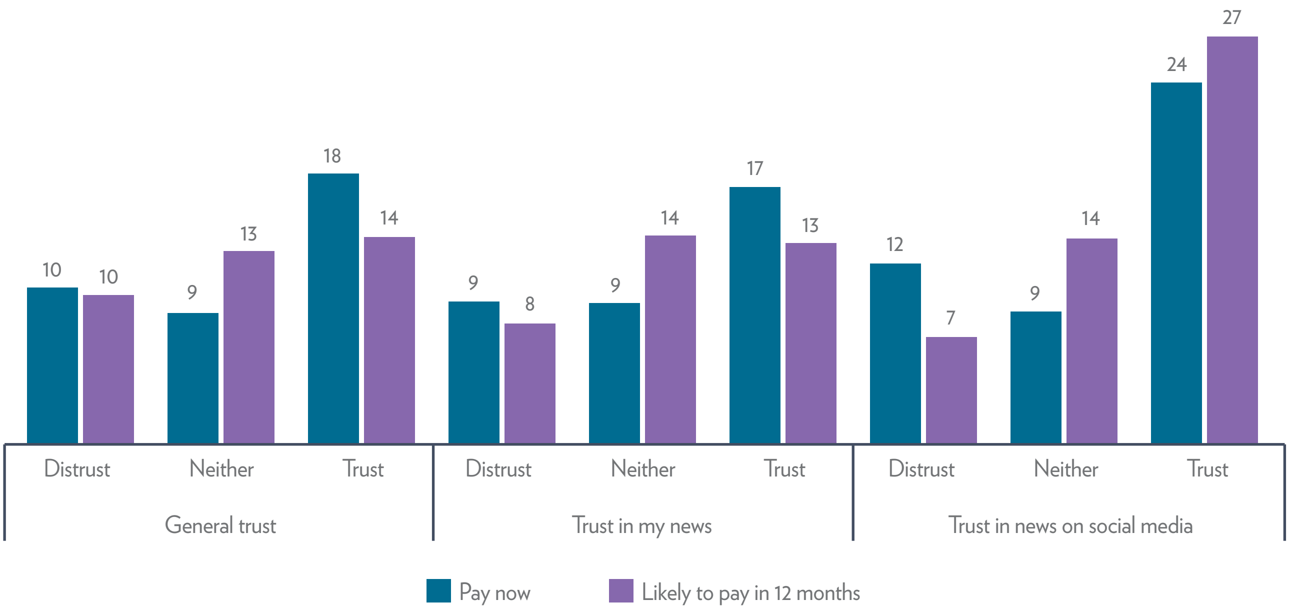



[Div1_2021] Thinking about the news in general in your country, do you think that there is too much, about the right amount, or not enough news coverage of each of the following? Your political views. Not enough; About the right amount; Too much; Don't know. [Base: N=2,034].

## THOSE WHO TRUST NEWS ARE MORE LIKELY TO PAY, THOSE WHO TRUST NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA ARE MOST LIKELY

Those who trust news are more likely to pay (18%) than those who say they neither trust nor distrust news (9%), or those who do not trust news (10%). This pattern is mirrored in people's willingness to pay in the future. Those who say they trust news are more likely to say they are likely to pay in the next year (14%) than those who do not trust news (10%). Those who trust news found on social media are much more likely to pay for news (24%) and they are also much more likely to say they will pay in the future (27%) (see **figure 7.19**).

**FIGURE 7.19:** PAYING FOR NEWS BY TRUST (%)

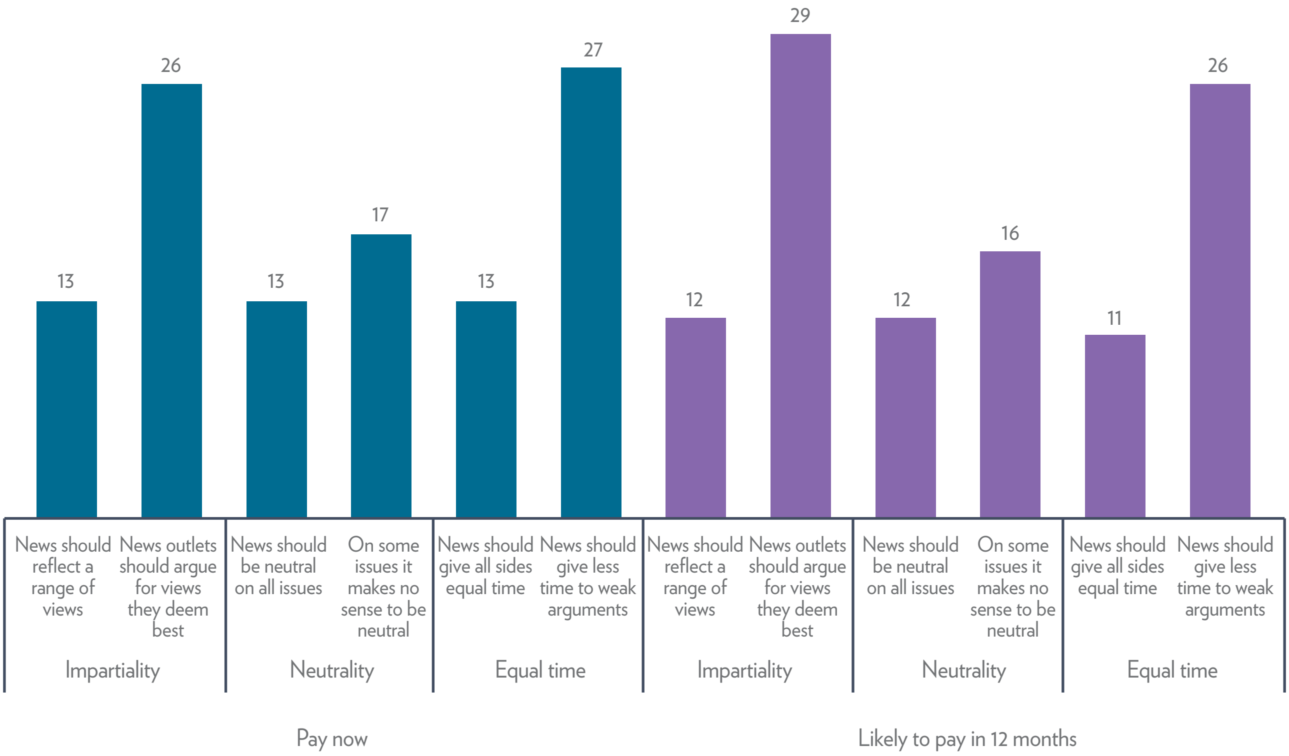



[Q6_2016_1] I think you can trust most news most of the time. I think I can trust most of the news I consume most of the time [Q6_2018_2] I think I can trust news in social media most of the time. Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly Agree. [Base: All=2,034].

## THOSE WHO THINK NEWS SHOULD TAKE A POSITION ARE MORE LIKELY TO PAY FOR NEWS

People's view about the ideals of impartiality are associated with their willingness to pay for news. Those who support news organisations having their own voices are more likely to be paying for news. Those who say news outlets should argue for the views they deem best (26%), those who think news shouldn't be neutral on every topic (17%) and those who want news to give less time to weaker arguments (27%) are much more likely to be paying for news. These groups are also more likely to say they will pay for online news in the next twelve months (see **figure 7.20**).

**FIGURE 7.20:** JOURNALISTIC VALUES AND NEWS PAYMENT (%)




[Q_IMPARTIAL1_2021] Thinking about the news in general in your country, when news outlets report on social and political issues, which of the following comes closest to your view? News outlets should reflect a range of different views and leave it up to people to decide; News outlets should argue for the views that they think are the best; Don't Know/ There are some issues where it makes no sense for news outlets to try to be neutral; News outlets should try to be neutral on every issue; Don't know/ News outlets should give equal time to all sides; News outlets should give less time to sides they think have a weaker argument; Don't know. [Base: 'pay now' (N=2,034), 'likely to pay in 12 months' (N=1,692)].

## SUMMARY

While in the past few years, there had been a slow but steady increase in the number of news consumers paying for online news, during the COVID-19 pandemic this number did not increase with only 13% of Australian news consumers paying for news. Given many newspapers suspended their print editions due to falls in advertising revenue and shifted to paywalled online news, it is surprising that the number of ongoing subscribers has not increased. This suggests that despite the industry's shift to paywalled services our data does not reflect audiences shifting with them.

The vast majority subscribe to only a small number of news services. Nevertheless, the habits and attitudes of younger generations are promising as they are certainly more likely to pay for news now and in the future.

There were certain characteristics of those who pay for news that have implications for news organisations. For example, those who feel attached to the people who live in their city, district, town or village are more willing to pay for online news. Those who would like news outlets to be more vocal about their viewpoint and see stronger arguments in the news are much more likely to be paying for news. Those who feel that their political views are sufficiently and fairly represented are more likely to pay. Those who have trust in news are more likely to pay for news than those who do not trust it. Meeting audiences' needs and expectations is an important factor in getting them to pay.

Importantly, the data reveal a general lack of awareness about the current state of the news industry among Australians, with only a third (34%) knowing that news outlets are less profitable than they were a decade ago, and only one-third (34%) expressing concern. A large number of Australians are indifferent on this matter with 41% saying they don't know, indicating a low level of engagement. Many people (44%) disagree that the government should support commercial news organisations that are financially suffering.

While those who are aware of the current state of news industries are more likely to pay for news compared to those who do not know, they are not necessarily supportive of the government stepping in to help financially struggling news outlets. Overall, less than a quarter of Australians think the government should step in, indicating a lack of general support for government subsidy. Given that Australians are not really concerned about the financial state of news outlets and that most of them are not aware of the financial crisis, it is not surprising that many feel the government should not step into help. Almost one-third (32%) did not have a view about government support, which is another indicator of a lack of interest in the news environment.

There seems to be a lag between the rapidly shifting news environment and news consumers knowledge and awareness of the changes. Online subscription to news services is also lagging behind. The news industry and the government will have to reconsider their current strategies to close these gaps.

# COMMENTARY

## THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC INTEREST JOURNALISM REQUIRES SUPPORT FROM INDUSTRY, GOVERNMENT AND CONSUMERS

**Anna Draffin,** Chief Executive Officer, Public Interest Journalism Initiative

Since the Public Interest Journalism Initiative's (PIJI) inception in late 2018 as an independent think tank researching a future for public interest journalism, there has been more change than anyone thought possible in the news media landscape, not just in Australia, but worldwide.

But one thing hasn't changed: the need to find ways to secure the future of news production, and more specifically, the future of public interest journalism, across its spectrum of investigative reporting to the nuts and bolts of routine but crucial news coverage. Indeed, if anything, this prerequisite has become even more urgent.

The already-broken financial model of news organisations has disintegrated in the wake of COVID-19, as the last vestiges of meaningful advertising revenue dried up and, as we can see from this report, the crystallising truth is that digital subscription models are not the saviour, as some may have hoped.

The raft of recent closures in news production have been tracked by PIJI's Australian Newsroom Mapping Project[1]. While green shoots have emerged in different hot spots, some recent market entrants have already closed their doors.

**The map has captured over 300 changes to date, two thirds of which are market contractions from the past 12 months alone and which are disproportionately skewed to regional Australia.**

News is part of the civil infrastructure of any working democracy and it plays a critical role in emergency infrastructure, as we have seen repeatedly during recent bushfires and floods[2]. It assists in building community resilience and cohesion, particularly in rural and regional areas, where so many news closures have taken place. Tellingly, in the data presented in this report, respondents who are more attached to their community are more likely to pay for news than those who do not.

However, the cost of producing public interest journalism is high and as financial returns on this essential service diminish, so too does the commercial incentive to continue its production.

Yet in this report, half of Australians indicate they are not concerned about the financial state of news organisations and a third aren't even aware that news outlets are less profitable than they were a decade ago.

Sustainable public interest journalism requires a thriving, diverse news sector, which necessarily includes commercial operators.

**To ensure media diversity and plurality in Australia, a mix of substantive, fiscal measures is necessary to support, transition and stimulate existing news businesses and encourage new entrants.**

The Federal Government has indicated it recognises the importance of news as an essential service, responding to the rapidly changing market conditions through pandemic-relief, such as the one-off $55M Public Interest News Gathering program and JobKeeper, as well as longer-term initiatives such as the legislative passage of the News Media Bargaining Code. The introduction of the code has moved digital platforms like Google and Facebook towards substantial financial deals with major media players that put a value on the commercial benefit derived by the platforms from news content. The context for these deals is a world first and sets a precedent for other jurisdictions as well as the future of Australian news.

But importantly, public policy intervention should support a spectrum of industry players; large and small, retail and wholesale, metro and regional. Equally, it must produce a public benefit to ensure support is tied directly to quality news production and availability, something that has not always been the case in the Australian context.

[1] This map tracks changes in news production and availability across Australia since 1 January 2019: Dickson G. 2020. Australian Newsroom Mapping Project. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. https://anmp.piji.com.au

[2] The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements showed 60% of people in bushfire-affected areas believed local reporting helped ensure their safety[1]. Radio media reached communities that couldn't access mobile, landline telephone, television or internet services: https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/nnd00101143

There are a range of further solutions worthy of consideration. Tax reform offers potentially strong returns on investment and public benefit, for example, an industry rebate scheme would link investment directly to journalistic resources and suggests a possible $356M injection for the industry[3]. Such a scheme has recently been introduced by the Canadian government. The introduction of specific settings to encourage philanthropic giving as per the US example may also stimulate more domestic, non-profit news media.

Australia's news blackout on Facebook in February 2021 demonstrated to the community the extent to which their everyday lives rely upon news and current affairs, especially during the COVID-19 era and amid rising dis- and misinformation.

Public interest journalism is a public good, which needs safeguarding now. There is no silver bullet. Its future requires investment from the industry itself, digital platforms, philanthropy, and government as well as consumer support.

[31] Centre for International Economics 2019. Tax Concessions for Public Interest Journalism. <https://piji.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/piji-tax-concessions-for-public-interest-journalism.pdf>

**NEWS MOMENTS**

April 8, 2020 | Cardinal George Pell was released from prison following a High Court decision to overturn previous convictions for child sex abuse. In 2021, media companies would receive over $1 million in fines for breaching suppression orders while reporting on Pell's conviction.

IMAGE: BIANCA DE MARCHI/ AAP IMAGE

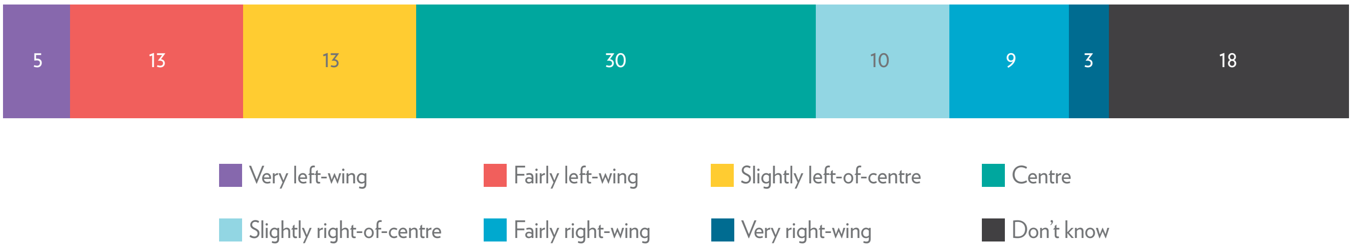
# 8 POLITICAL ORIENTATION

- Only one-third of Australians have a high interest in politics.
- More than one-quarter of those with low education (29%) 'don't know' their political orientation.
- Right-wing news consumers are more likely to say that news should reflect a range of views so people can make up their own mind (85%), than left-wing (72%) or centre (74%).
- Left-wing respondents (39%) are more likely to say there are some issues where it makes no sense for news outlets to try to be neutral, than centre (27%) and right-wing (21%).

## A CENTRE-LEFT POPULATION OF NEWS CONSUMERS

Consistent with previous surveys, 30% of Australians identify themselves as being of the political 'centre', 31% identify as either 'very left-wing', 'fairly left-wing' or 'slightly left of centre'. Overall, the majority of those surveyed (61%) identify with the centre-left of politics. Twenty-two percent align themselves with the right side of politics. Importantly, 18% of those surveyed don't know their political orientation (see **figure 8.1**).

**FIGURE 8.1:** POLITICAL ORIENTATION (%)

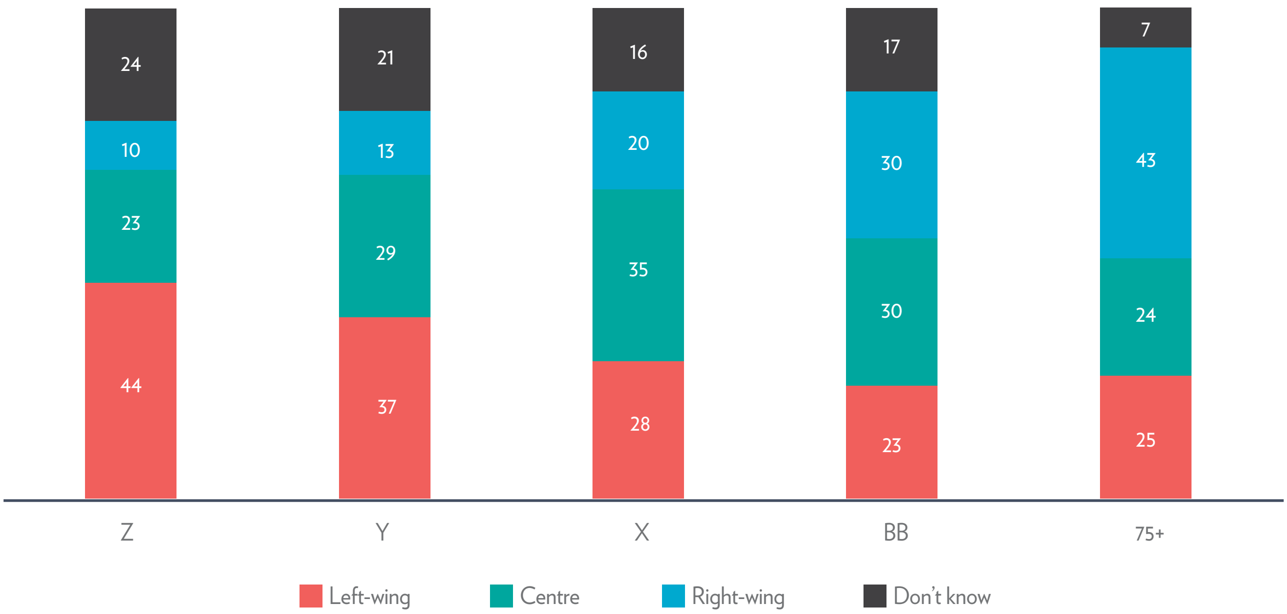



**[Q1F]** Some people talk about 'left', 'right' and 'centre' to describe parties and politicians. (Generally, socialist parties would be considered 'left wing' whilst conservative parties would be considered 'right wing'). With this in mind, where would you place yourself on the following scale? [Base: N=2,034].

## ONLY 10% OF GEN Z IDENTIFY AS RIGHT-WING

The overall political identification of participants hasn't changed significantly since 2020. Gen Z participants continue to be the most left-wing generation (44%), and people aged 75+ in the survey are still the most likely to identify as right-wing (43%). As with previous years, younger generations are much more likely to say they don't know their political orientation (see **figure 8.2**).

**FIGURE 8.2:** POLITICAL ORIENTATION BY GENERATION (%)

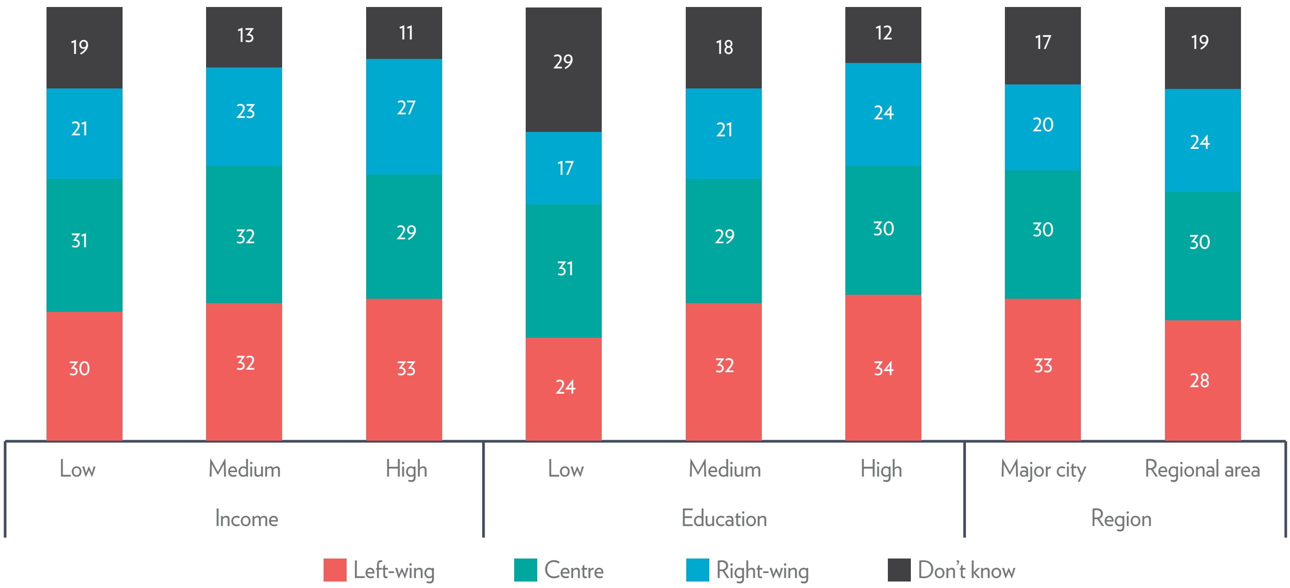


## POLITICAL ORIENTATION VARIES DEPENDING ON EDUCATION, INCOME, AND LOCATION

Those with low levels of education are much less likely to identify as either right-wing (17%) or left-wing (24%) compared to other education groups. They are also the most likely to say they 'don't know' their political orientation (29%) compared to those with medium (18%) or high levels of education (12%). This is up 7 percentage points from last year. Around one-third (34%) of those with high levels of education identify as left-wing, and 24% identify as right-wing.

People on high incomes (27%) are more likely to identify as right-wing than consumers on low incomes (21%), but people on low (30%), medium (32%) and high incomes (33%) identified fairly evenly as left-wing. Low-income earners are much more likely to say they 'don't know' their political orientation (19%) compared to medium (13%) or high (11%) income earners. Participants living in metropolitan areas (33%) are more likely to identify as left-wing than those who live in regional areas (28%). One-fifth of those living in a major city (20%) identify as right-wing (see **figure 8.3**).

**FIGURE 8.3:** POLITICAL ORIENTATION BY INCOME, EDUCATION AND REGION (%)



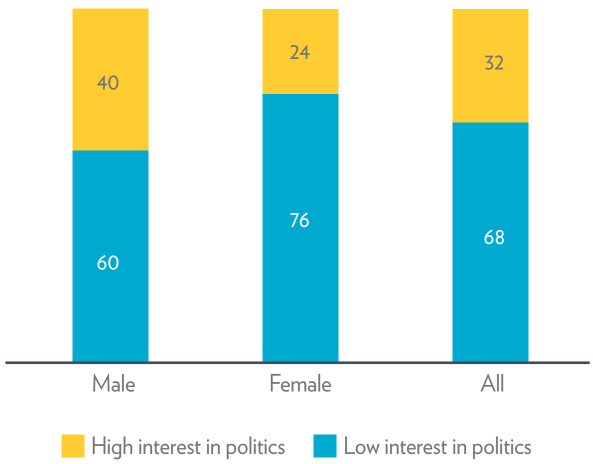

## AUSTRALIANS' INTEREST IN POLITICS REMAINS LOW

Interest in politics continues to be low, with less than one-third (32%) of respondents saying they are highly interested in politics. Correspondingly, more than two-thirds (68%) say they have little to no interest in politics (see **figure 8.4**).

## POLITICAL INTEREST IS GENDERED

Women are much more likely to say they have low or no interest in politics (76%) than men (60%). Just 24% of women say they have high interest in politics, compared to 40% of men (see **figure 8.4**).

**FIGURE 8.4:** INTEREST IN POLITICS BY GENDER (%)

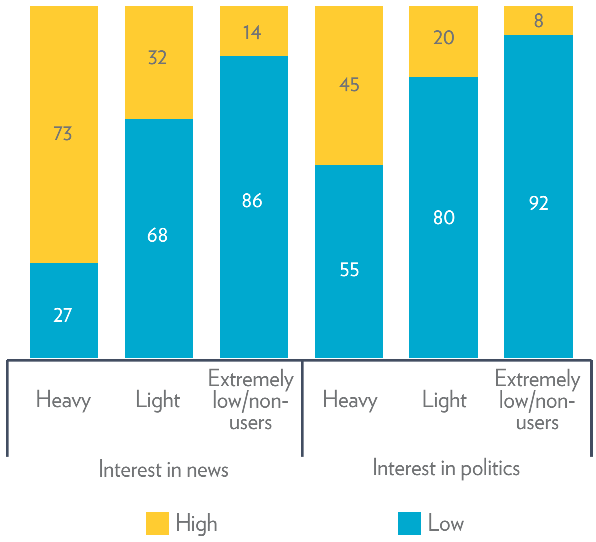



**[Q2_new2018]** How interested, if at all, would you say you are in politics? Extremely interested; Very interested; Somewhat interested; Not very interested; Not at all interested; Don't know. High interest includes 'extremely' and 'very'. Low interest includes 'somewhat', 'not very', and 'not at all'. [Base: N=2,034].

## INTEREST IN POLITICS AND NEWS IS RELATED TO NEWS CONSUMPTION

Interest in politics and news are related to overall levels of news consumption. A large proportion of heavy news consumers have high interest in politics (45%) and news (73%). In contrast, only 32% of light news consumers have high interest in news and 20% have high interest in politics. Among extremely low or non news consumers, only 8% say they have a high interest in politics, and surprisingly 14% say they are highly interested in news (see **figure 8.5**).

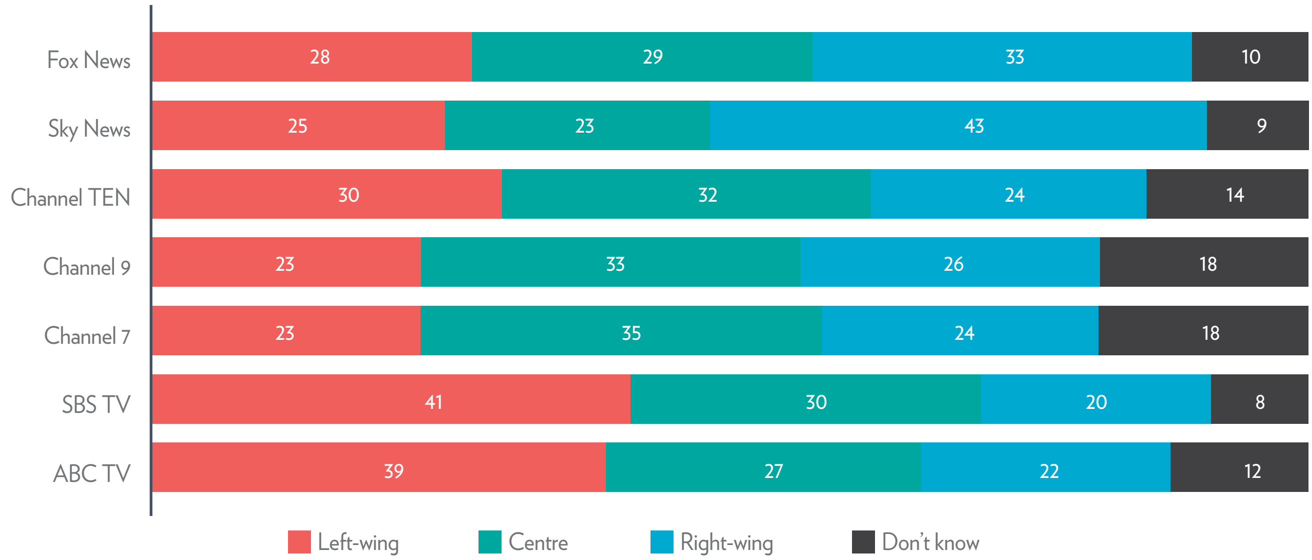
**FIGURE 8.5:** INTEREST IN NEWS AND POLITICS BY NEWS ACCESS (%)




## MORE SKY NEWS VIEWERS IDENTIFY AS RIGHT-WING THAN FOX NEWS AUDIENCES

When we examine individual news brands more closely, we continue to see that news consumption is divided along the lines of political orientation. Viewers of the two national broadcasters, the ABC (39%) and the SBS (41%), are more likely to identify as left-wing, than right-wing. Fox News audiences are quite evenly spread across the political spectrum, and Sky News viewers are more likely to identify as right-wing (43%) than left-wing (25%). Around one-third of commercial free-to-air TV news viewers are more likely to identify with the centre of politics: Channel 7 (35%), 9 (33%), and TEN (32%) (see **figure 8.6**).

**FIGURE 8.6:** TV NEWS VIEWERS BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION (%)

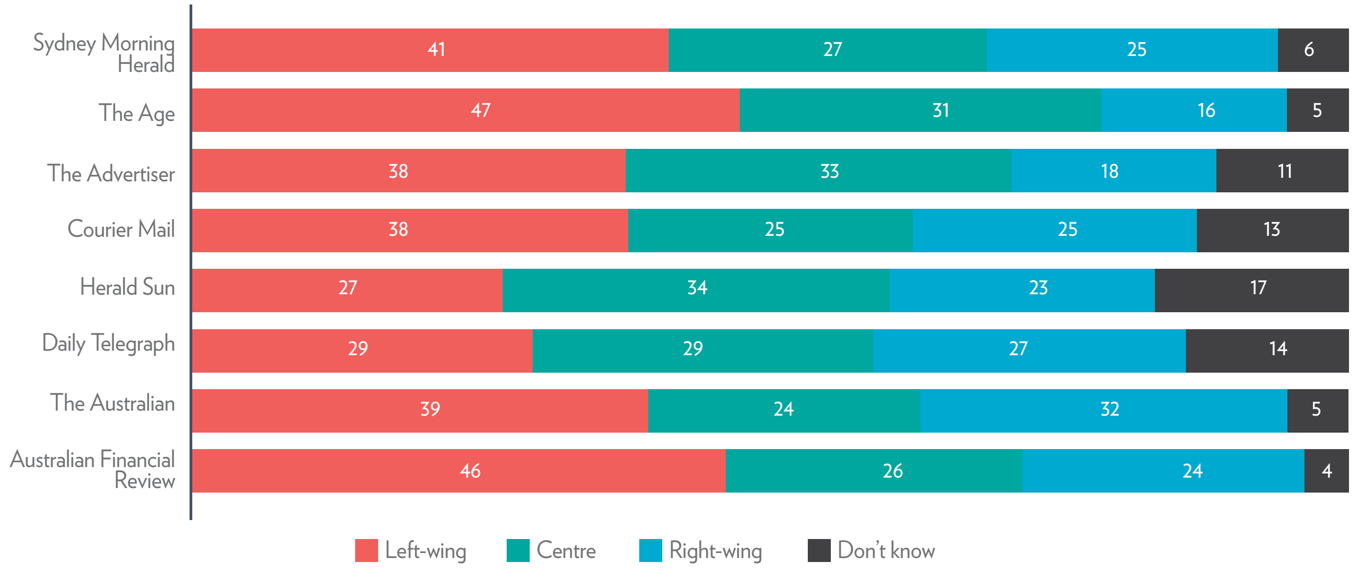



[Q5A] Which of the following brands have you used to access news offline in the last week (via TV, radio, print, and other traditional media)? Please select all that apply. [Base: Fox News(N=119), Sky News(N=205), Channel TEN(N=386), Channel 9(N=738), Channel 7(N=787), SBS TV(N=297), ABC TV(N=687)].

## POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF NEWSPAPER READERS

Readers of the former Fairfax newspapers, *The Age* (47%), *Australian Financial Review* (46%) and *Sydney Morning Herald* (41%) continue to be more left-wing than the *Herald Sun* (27%) and *The Daily Telegraph* readers (29%). Almost 40% of readers of *The Australian* newspaper identify as left-wing (39%), and 32% as right-wing (see **figure 8.7**). Since 2020, there has been an increase in left-wing survey respondents saying they read *The Australian* newspaper (+7) and the *Australian Financial Review* (+6).

**FIGURE 8.7:** NEWSPAPER READERS BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION (%)

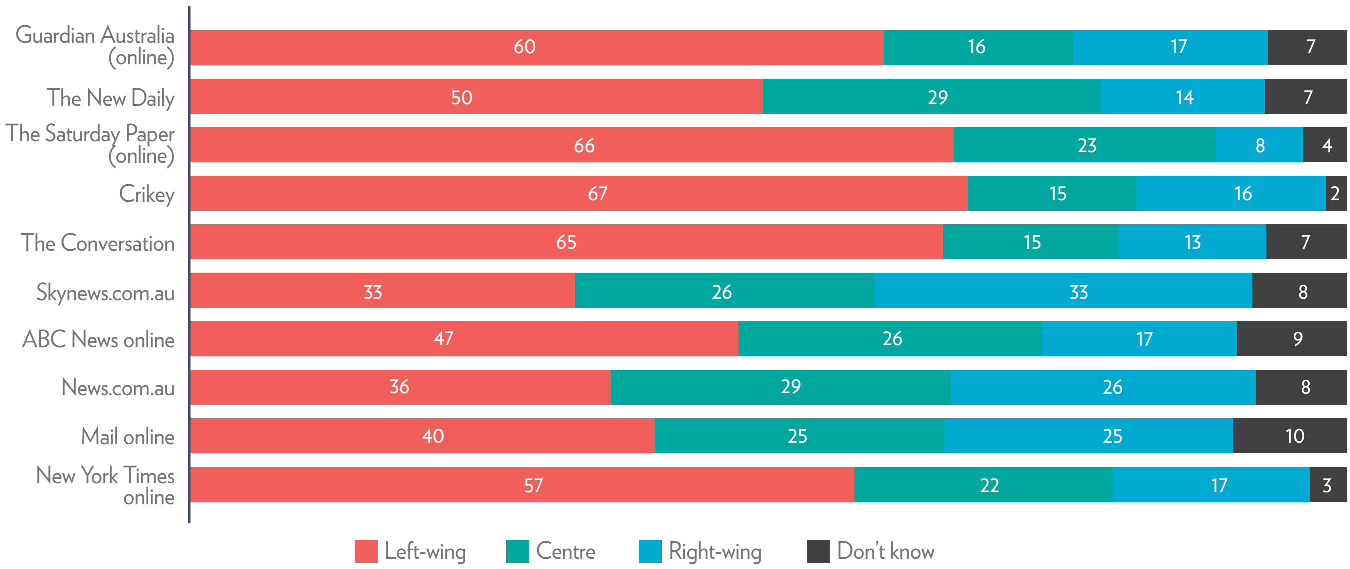



[Base: *Sydney Morning Herald*(N=131), *The Age*(N=131), *The Advertiser*(N=96), *Courier Mail*(N=122), *Herald Sun*(N=179), *Daily Telegraph*(N=163), *The Australian*(N=170), *Australian Financial Review*(N=78)].

## POLITICAL ORIENTATION AND ONLINE NEWS BRANDS

When we look at political orientation of online news consumers, we get a picture of a far more left-leaning audience. Around two-thirds of people who read Crikey, The Saturday Paper, and The Conversation, identify as left-wing. Skynews.com.au equally attracts left-wing and right-wing online news consumers (33%) (see **figure 8.8**).

**FIGURE 8.8:** ONLINE NEWS CONSUMERS BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION (%)

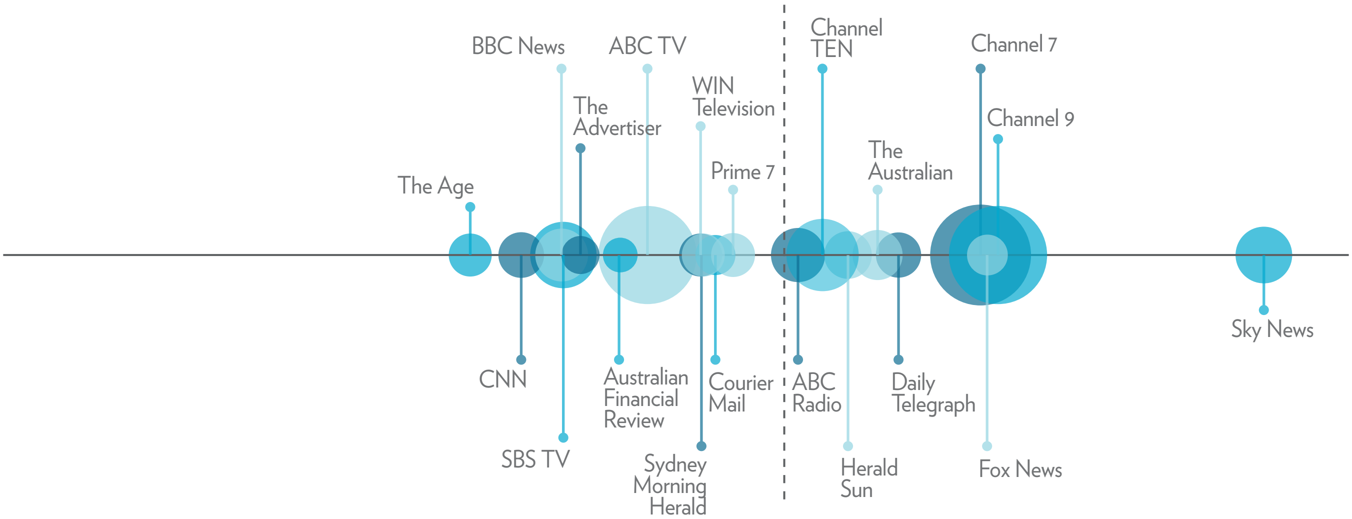



[Q5B] Which of the following brands have you used to access news online in the last week (via websites, apps, social media, and other forms of Internet access)? Please select all that apply. [Base: Guardian Australia(N=220), The New Daily(N=113), The Saturday Paper(N=53), Crikey(N=55), The Conversation(N=86), Skynews.com.au(N=147), ABC News online(N=527), News.com.au(N=445), Mail online(N=92), New York Times online(N=94)].

**Figure 8.9** is a visualisation of the political orientation of Australian news audiences who consume traditional offline news brands such as print newspapers and TV news.

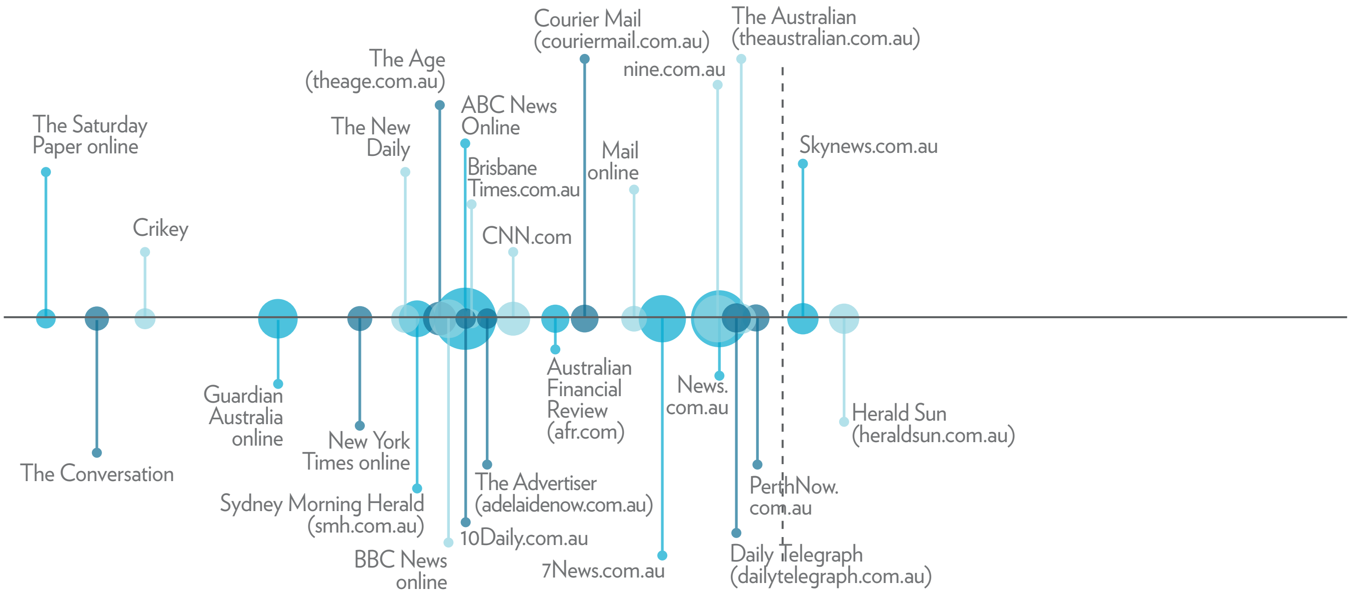
**Figure 8.10** is a visualisation of the political orientation of Australian audiences who get news from online news brands.

**FIGURE 8.9:** POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF AUDIENCES OF OFFLINE NEWS BRANDS




Midpoint within country (3.82). Polarisation score for each brand is the difference between the mean score out of 7 of the news consumers and the mean score of the population as a whole, expressed in multiples of the standard deviation of the mean score of the population as a whole.

**FIGURE 8.10:** POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF AUDIENCES OF ONLINE NEWS BRANDS



## POLITICAL ORIENTATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA BRANDS

Those who use social media for news are more likely to identify with the centre or left of politics. This may reflect the left-leaning orientation of Gen Z and Gen Y. Twitter users are the most likely to identify as left-wing (54%) followed by those who use Instagram for news (41%). Only 19% of consumers who use Twitter for news identify as right-wing (see **figure 8.11**).

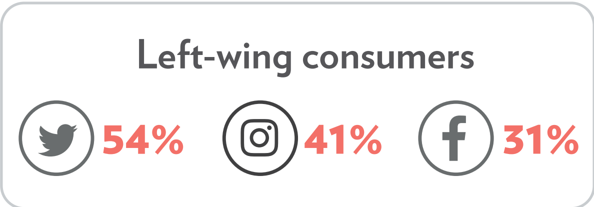
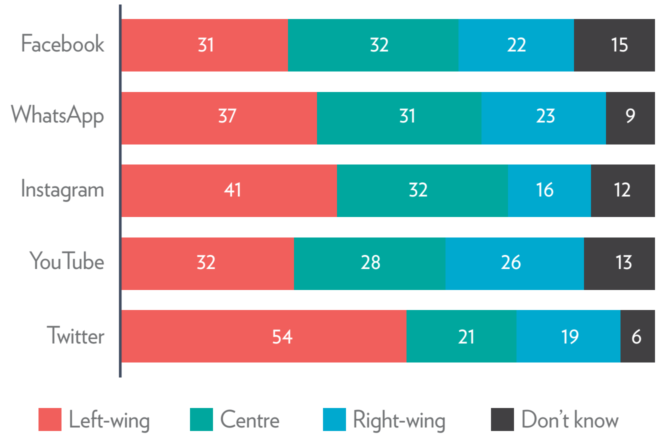



**FIGURE 8.11:** SOCIAL MEDIA NEWS CONSUMERS BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION FOR SELECTED PLATFORMS (%)




[Q12B] Which, if any, of the following have you used for finding, reading, watching, sharing, or discussing news in the last week? [Base: Facebook(N=672), WhatsApp(N=185), Instagram(N=200), YouTube(N=413), Twitter(N=185)].

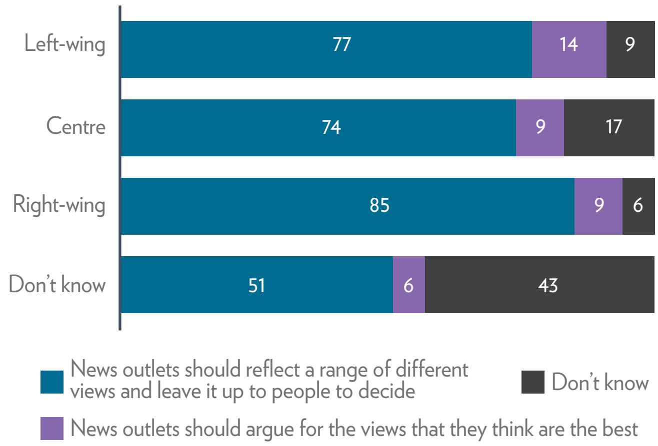
## LEFT-WING ARE COMFORTABLE WITH NEWS THAT TAKES A POSITION & RIGHT-WING ARE MORE SUPPORTIVE OF IMPARTIALITY

This year, we asked respondents about their perception of traditional journalism values of impartiality, neutrality, and balance (giving equal time to all sides in news) (see **Chapter 2**). One of the most interesting and consistent findings across the three questions is the correlation between political orientation of consumers and their level of agreement with these ideals.

Overall, people strongly support news that provides a range of views. But as **figure 8.12** shows, those who identify as right-wing are more likely to say that news outlets should reflect a range of different views (85%), compared to 77% of left-wing respondents. Almost half of those who don't know their political orientation (43%) do not have a view, indicating a lack of engagement on this issue.

In relation to news outlets remaining neutral on every issue, right-wing news consumers (72%) are more supportive than left-wing (54%). Additionally, those who identity as left-wing (39%) are more likely than centre (27%) or right-wing (21%) respondents to believe that it makes no sense for news outlets to try to be neutral on some issues (see **figure 8.13**). Considering that younger people are more likely to identify as left-wing (44% of Gen Z) this suggests younger people are less wedded to traditional journalism ideals. This could have implications for the way news is reported in future (See **Chapter 2**).

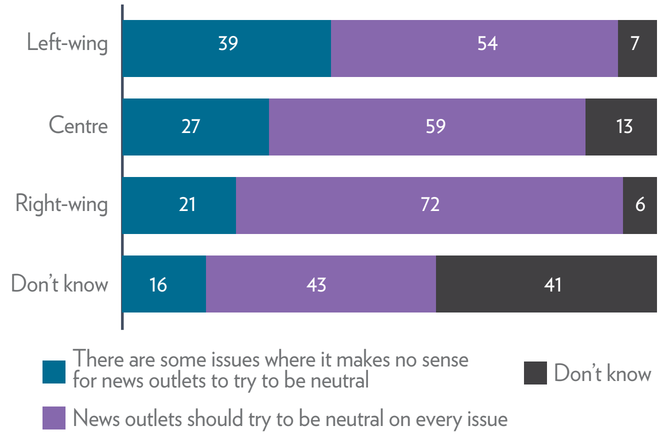
**FIGURE 8.12:** SUPPORT FOR IMPARTIALITY BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION (%)




[Q_IMPARTIAL1_2021] Thinking about the news in general in your country, when news outlets report on social and political issues, which of the following comes closest to your view? News outlets should reflect a range of different views and leave it up to people to decide; News outlets should argue for the views that they think are the best; Don't Know. [Base: N=2,034].

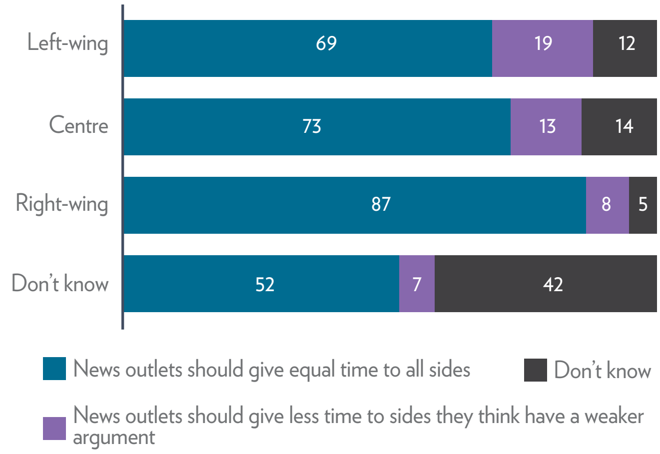
Even more markedly, 87% of right-wing news consumers agree that news outlets should give equal time to all sides, compared to only 69% of left-wing. Responses to this question again suggest a low level of political engagement and media literacy, with 42% of participants who don't know their political orientation also not knowing whether news outlets should give equal time to opposing views or not (see **figure 8.14**).

**FIGURE 8.13:** SUPPORT FOR NEUTRALITY BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION (%)




[Q_IMPARTIAL2_2021a] Thinking about the news in general in your country, when news outlets report on social and political issues, which of the following comes closest to your view? There are some issues where it makes no sense for news outlets to try to be neutral; News outlets should try to be neutral on every issue; Don't know. [Base: N=2,034].

**FIGURE 8.14:** SUPPORT FOR EQUAL TIME BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION (%)




[Q_IMPARTIAL3_2021] Thinking about the news in general in your country, when news outlets report on social and political issues, which of the following comes closest to your view? News outlets should give equal time to all sides; News outlets should give less time to sides they think have a weaker argument; Don't know. [Base: N=2,034].

## SUMMARY

The findings in this year's survey confirm the divide between young people who tend to identify as left-wing and the rest of the population. This accords with the significantly different news consumption habits of young people, who mainly access news on social media via their mobile phones. They also tend to have a weaker loyalty to traditional news brands[1].

When it comes to the journalistic values of impartiality, balance and neutrality, we identified polarised views about the way people think the news should be reported. Left-wing news consumers are more comfortable with news that takes a position rather than maintaining neutrality. As more left-leaning Gen Zs enter the workforce and their purchasing power increases, their lower attachment to traditional journalism values of impartiality and neutrality could have implications for the future of news reporting.

The findings suggest a relationship between having a clear political orientation (i.e., identifying with a side of politics) and holding a belief about journalistic values. Those who don't know their political orientation are much more likely not to have an opinion on questions of impartiality, neutrality or giving equal time to all sides of an issue. This suggests lower levels of media literacy and political awareness among this cohort.

[1] Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. (2019). *How young people consume news and the implications for mainstream media.* Oxford, Reuters Institute. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-02/FlamingoxREUTERS-Report-Full-KG-V28.pdf

# COMMENTARY

## AUSTRALIANS ARE LESS INTERESTED IN POLITICS, BUT THEIR ATTENTIONS HAVE BEEN NONETHELESS CAPTURED THROUGH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Clare Armstrong,** National Political Reporter, The Daily Telegraph

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted the daily lives of Australians and ushered in an intense period of political engagement rarely seen outside the final days of an election campaign.

Though two thirds of Australians this year said they have 'low' or 'no' interest in politics, the community has also been highly attuned to government decision making over the past year despite this professed indifference.

Long after the first COVID-19 wave was suppressed, job security, border debates, mask wearing and localised lockdowns to deal with outbreaks have dominated dinner table conversation, and politicians have been the central players in these issues.

At various times, millions of people have gathered around TV screens or turned to newspapers and websites to learn the fate of their jobs, holiday plans or if their child will be allowed to go to school the next day.

**You needn't look any further for evidence Australians really were paying attention to politics – even if they thought they weren't - than in every election result since the pandemic began.**

In single by-elections and state or territory-wide elections, the dramatic swing in favour of incumbency shows Australians directly credit their current relative safety from COVID-19 with those who have governed them throughout the pandemic.

From the enormous majority secured by the Labor Party in Western Australia, to the historic third-term win for the Liberal Party in Tasmania, these results show in a time of crisis voters were far more swayed by the issues than by what they might consider their normal political orientation.

This year about 31 per cent of people surveyed identified as left of centre, while only 22 per cent said they were on the right and about 30 per cent were centre. People in the remaining 18 per cent who said they did not know their political orientation were more likely to have a low education and income.

However, these demographic tendencies primarily signal a disinterest or lack of knowledge about an abstract label, rather than an absence of political engagement or understanding in the real world.

**This 'don't know' group, combined with the large cohort at the 'centre' indicates what we have long known, which is that many Australians vote based on issues of the day or personal preference of leader than an unwavering allegiance to a particular side of politics.**

About 44 per cent of those survey who were Gen Z, roughly defined as those born after 1997, identified as left wing.

Throughout modern history younger generations have long been drivers of progressive social change, so it is unsurprising a large number consistently identify with left wing politics.

Younger Australians are increasingly concerned about the environment and the impacts of climate change, but the COVID-19 pandemic too uniquely impacted this age group.

People under the age of 24-years-old, particularly women, were considerably more likely to have lost their job or suffered reduced hours during the lockdown period.

And while crowds in the tens of thousands have resumed attending sporting events across the country, the return important cultural touchstones for younger Australians, like live music events, remains deeply uncertain.

Many young Australians may rightly feel their futures, livelihoods and social activities have been either jeopardised or overlooked by a centre-right government, and subsequently a larger cohort has been pushed toward the left.

How a person's political orientation impacts their news consumption, which then plays a role in either galvanising or challenging their beliefs, is less clear.

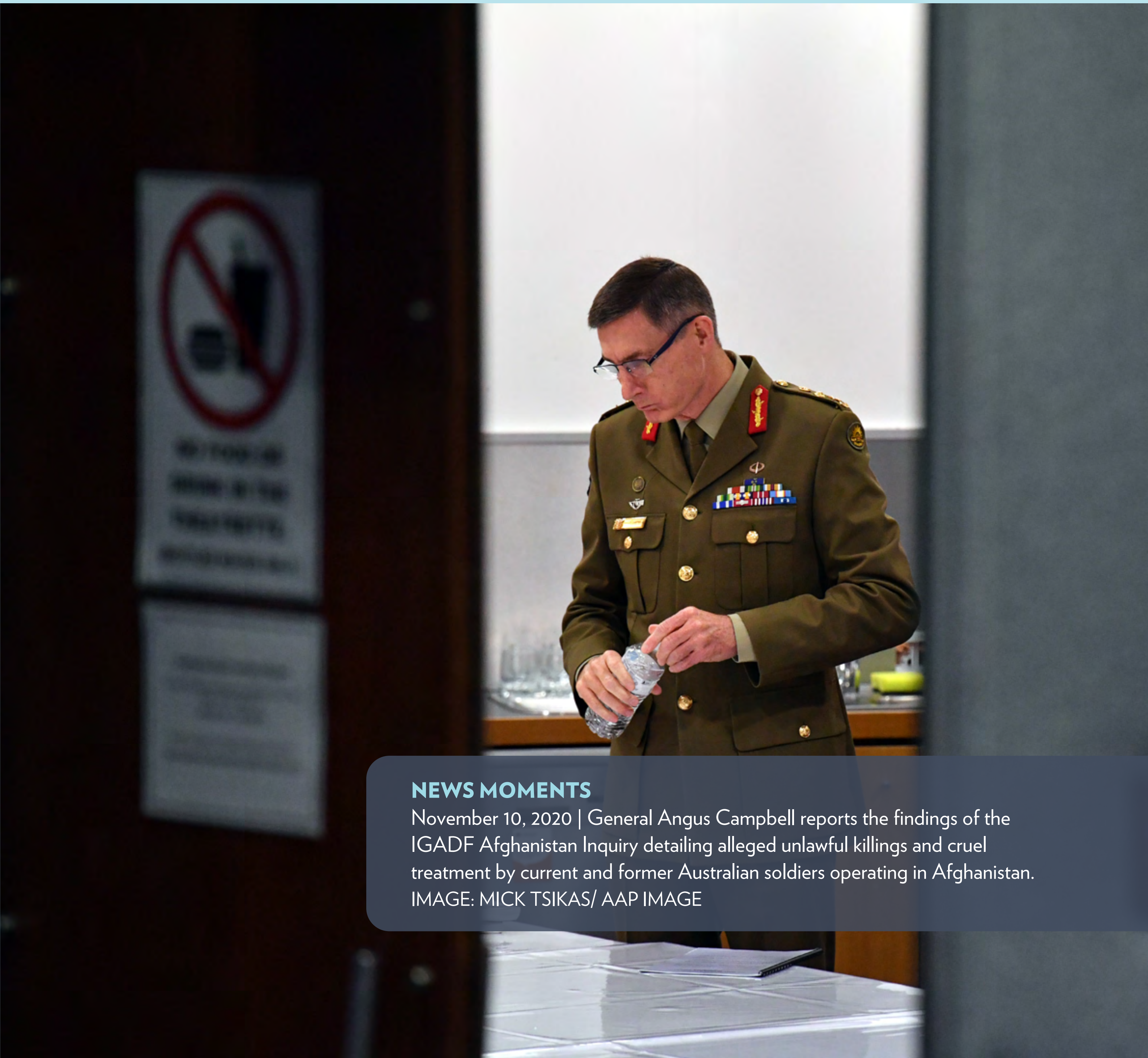
Social media has significantly fuelled political polarisation in the last decade as its algorithms, by design, show users more of what they want to see, rather than a broader mix of ideas presented in traditional media.

Though the survey also showed television viewers were likely to be drawn to the outlet they feel they politically aligned to - with 43 per cent of Sky News viewers identifying as right-wing and 39 per cent of ABC viewers identifying as left-wing - this trend was undercut by the broader picture showing each network attracted a genuine cross-section of political views.

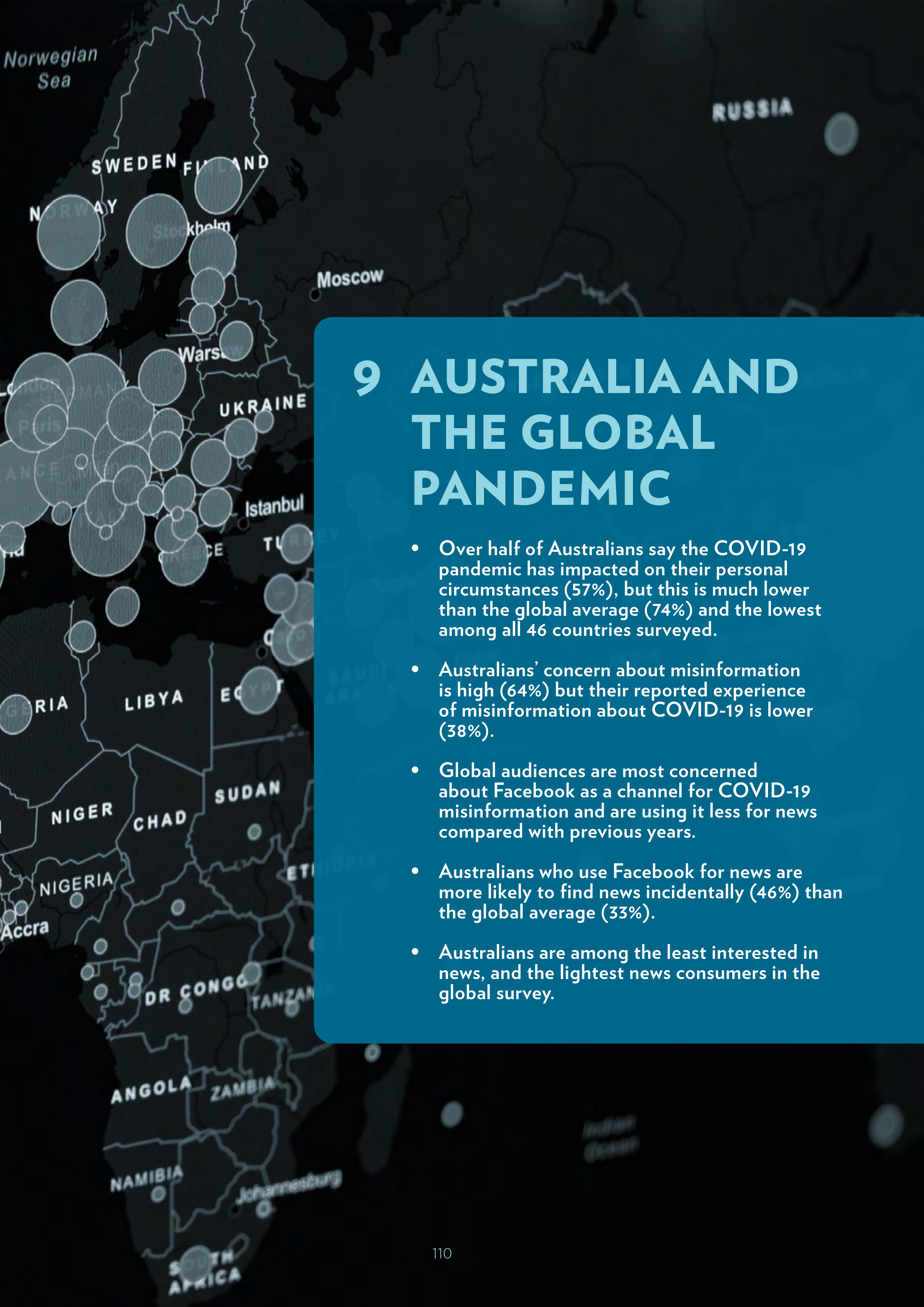
About a third of all television viewers of any major media network identified as 'centre', which was also reflected in newspaper consumption.

Across the board no one paper's readership consisted of a majority of a single political orientation.

As much as there will be cohorts driven further toward social media for news as a source of confirmation bias, Australians' continued strong engagement with a broad range of traditional outlets shows in times of crisis these media institutions are a critical source of information.



**NEWS MOMENTS**
November 10, 2020 | General Angus Campbell reports the findings of the IGADF Afghanistan Inquiry detailing alleged unlawful killings and cruel treatment by current and former Australian soldiers operating in Afghanistan.
IMAGE: MICK TSIKAS/ AAP IMAGE




# 9 AUSTRALIA AND THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC

- Over half of Australians say the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on their personal circumstances (57%), but this is much lower than the global average (74%) and the lowest among all 46 countries surveyed.
- Australians' concern about misinformation is high (64%) but their reported experience of misinformation about COVID-19 is lower (38%).
- Global audiences are most concerned about Facebook as a channel for COVID-19 misinformation and are using it less for news compared with previous years.
- Australians who use Facebook for news are more likely to find news incidentally (46%) than the global average (33%).
- Australians are among the least interested in news, and the lightest news consumers in the global survey.

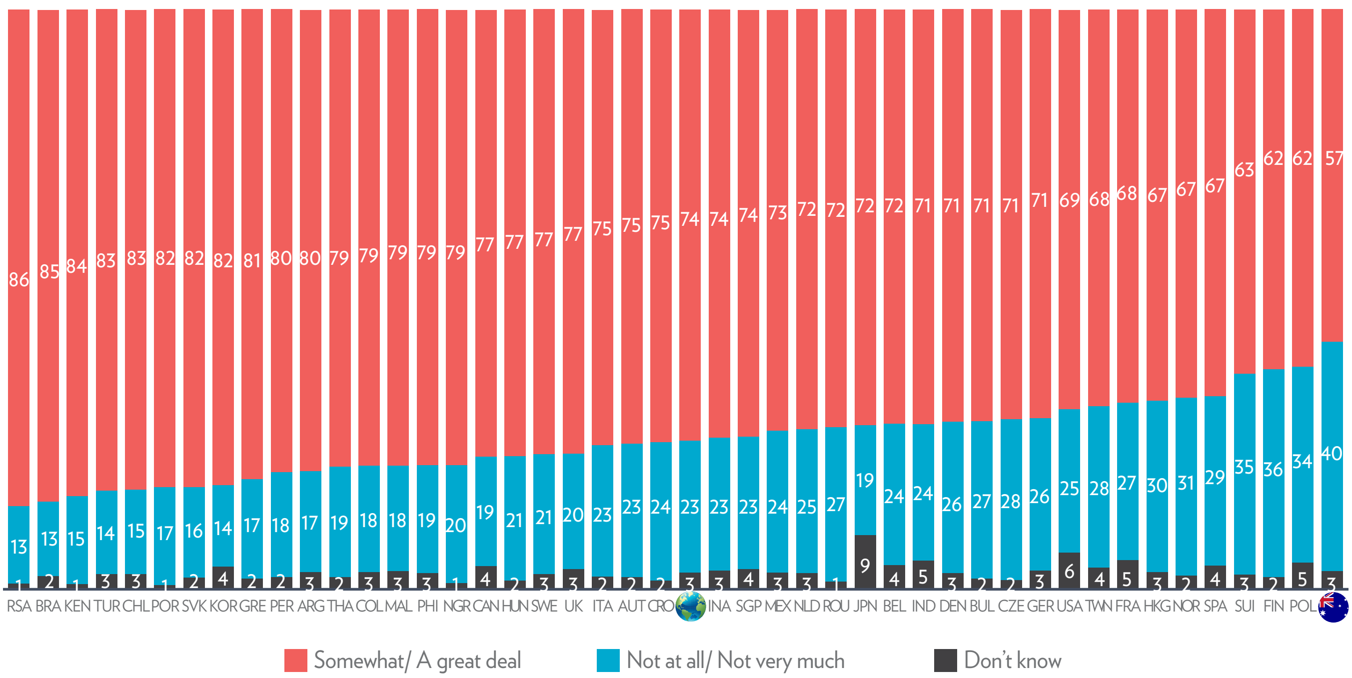
**This chapter explores Australia's news media consumption in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Much has already been written and said about how the global spread of the virus has changed the lives of billions through wide-reaching impacts on global trade, politics, freedom of movement, financial markets, healthcare, personal hardship, injury, and death. In 2021, it is impossible to consider news production and consumption outside of this context, particularly in Australia, where the pandemic had a big impact on the local news industry. This chapter highlights changes in news consumption in the COVID era within the global context.**

## AUSTRALIANS ARE LEAST LIKELY TO SAY COVID-19 IMPACTED ON THEIR LIVES

Australian audiences report the lowest impact of COVID-19 on their personal circumstances (57%) out of the 46 countries surveyed this year (see **figure 9.1**). In many countries, a clear majority say their lives have changed 'somewhat' or 'a great deal' due to the pandemic, with South Africa (86%) and Brazil (85%) reporting major disruption.

Australia records the lowest proportion who say that their personal situation has changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (57%), and the highest proportion saying their lives have not changed (40%). This likely reflects the low levels of infection in Australia.

**FIGURE 9.1:** IMPACT OF COVID-19 (%)

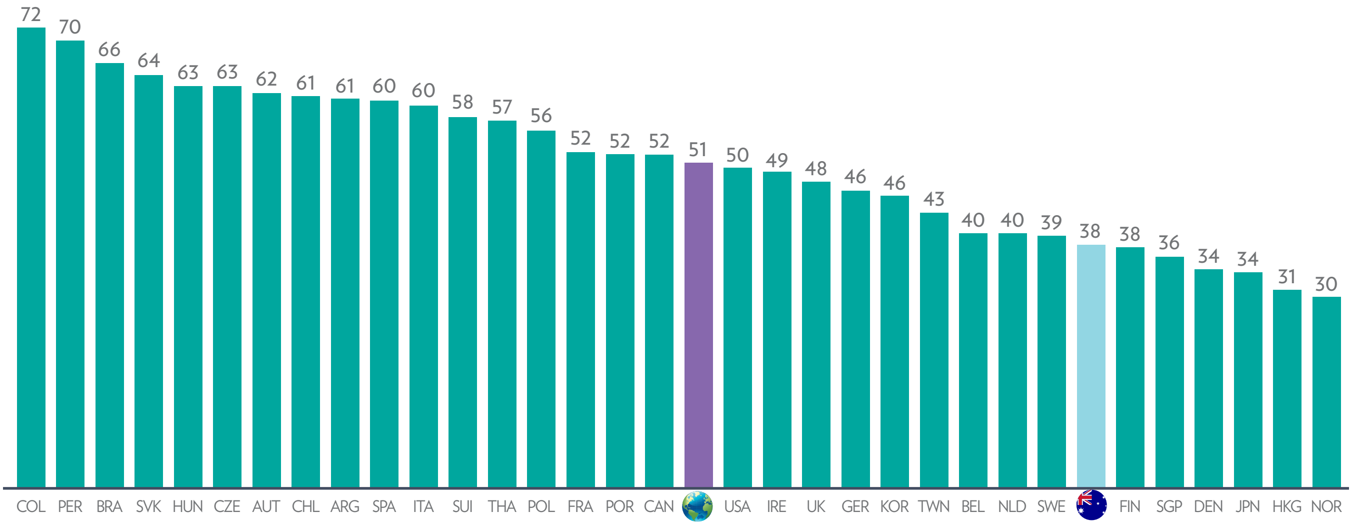



[Coronaimpact] Thinking about all aspects of your life, how much, if at all, has the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation changed things for you personally? Not at all, Not very much, Somewhat, A great deal, Don't know. *Global average among all 46 countries surveyed. [N=92,372]

## EXPERIENCE OF COVID-19 MISINFORMATION IN AUSTRALIA IS LOWER THAN MANY OTHER COUNTRIES

Along with COVID-19 came a wave of false and misleading information about the pandemic that the World Health Organisation declared a global infodemic. As is the case with the impact of COVID-19 on personal circumstances, Australians report lower levels of experience of the infodemic than audiences in other countries. Only 38% of Australians say they encountered false or misleading information about COVID-19 in the past week. In contrast, more than half of global audiences encountered misinformation about COVID-19 (51%). Some countries had a much higher experience, such as Columbia (72%), Peru (70%) and Brazil (66%). Few countries reported a lower level of experience than Australia (see **figure 9.2**).

**FIGURE 9.2:** EXPERIENCE OF MISINFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 (%)

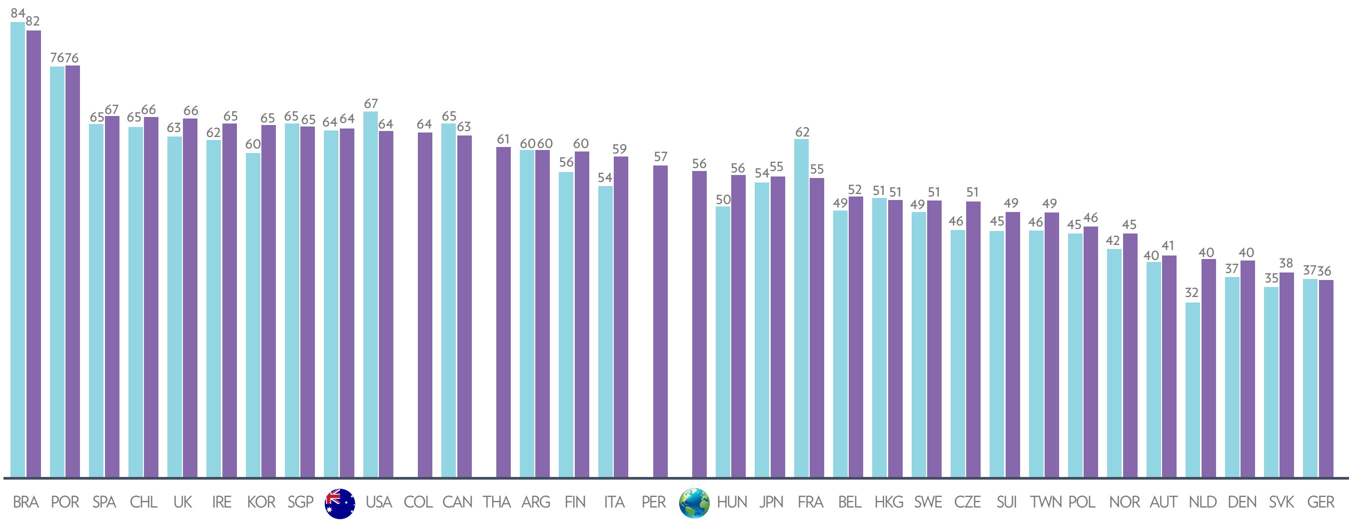



[Q_FAKE_NEWS_2021a] Have you seen false or misleading information about any of the following topics, in the last week? Please select all that apply. Politics; Coronavirus (COVID-19); Other health issues; Celebrities (e.g. actors, musicians, sports stars); Immigration; Products and services; Climate change or the environment; Other (please specify); None of these; Don't know. *Global average among 33 countries (see methodology). [Base: N=66,092]

## AUSTRALIANS' CONCERN ABOUT FALSE OR MISLEADING INFORMATION ONLINE IS HIGHER THAN THE GLOBAL AVERAGE

Apart from COVID-19 misinformation, concern about false or misleading information generally remains high. Almost two-thirds of Australians say they are worried about what is real or fake on the internet (64%), which is much higher than the global average of 56% (see **figure 9.3**). Outside the Asia-Pacific region, countries such as Brazil (82%) and Portugal (76%) reported the highest levels of concern and Denmark (40%), Slovakia (38%) and Germany (36%) reported the lowest.

**FIGURE 9.3:** CONCERN ABOUT MISINFORMATION 2020-2021 (%)

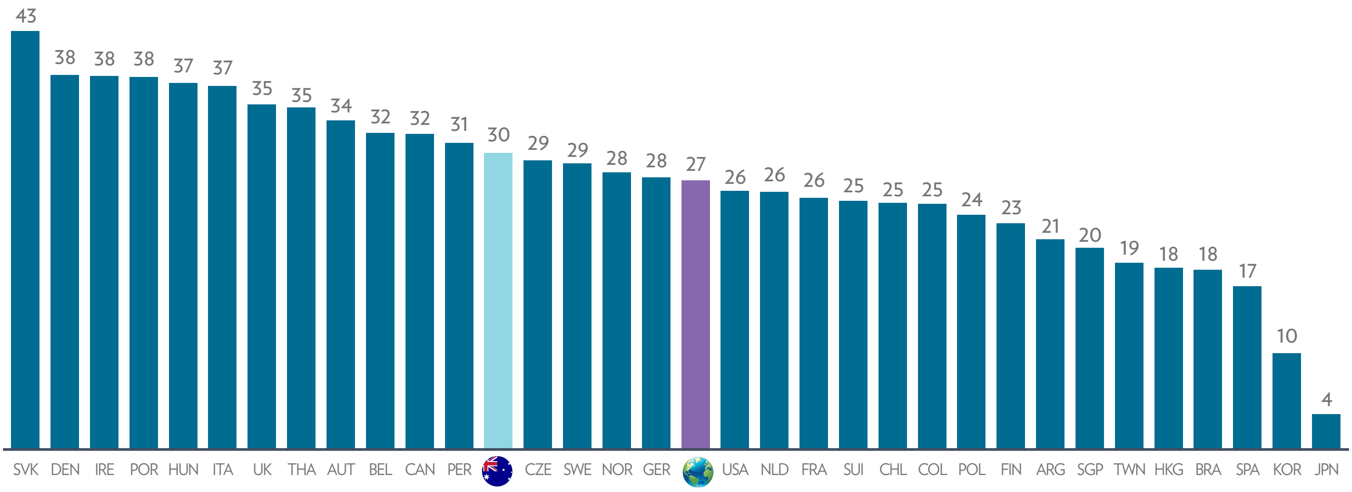



[Q_FAKE_NEWS_1] Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. Thinking about online news, I am concerned about what is real and what is fake on the internet. Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree. *Global average among 33 countries (see methodology). [Base: 2020 (N=60,026) 2021 (N=66,093)]

## GLOBALLY, NEWS CONSUMERS ARE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT FACEBOOK AS A CHANNEL FOR COVID-19 MISINFORMATION

Globally, audiences are most concerned about Facebook as a channel for COVID-19 misinformation compared to other media platforms. Thirty percent of Australians say they are worried about false or misleading information about the pandemic on Facebook, which is higher than the global average (27%) (see **figure 9.4**). Compared to other media platforms, such as news websites, search, YouTube or Twitter, Facebook was ranked the most concerning in 28 countries. Six countries ranked news websites or apps highest, 4 countries ranked messaging apps highest, 1 ranked Twitter and 1 ranked YouTube as the most concerning channel.

**FIGURE 9.4:** CONCERN ABOUT COVID-19 MISINFORMATION ON FACEBOOK (%)

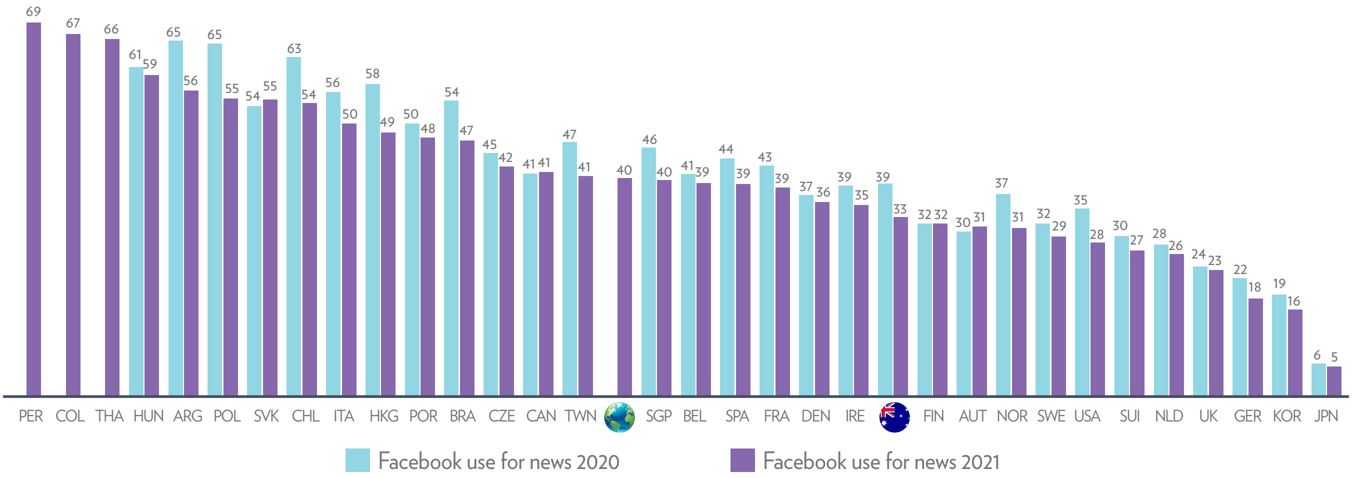



[Q_FAKE_NEWS_2021c] Thinking specifically about coronavirus (COVID-19) and its effects, which of the following, if any, are you most concerned about online? Please select one. False or misleading information via... News websites or apps; Search engines (e.g. Google, Bing); Facebook; Twitter; YouTube; Messaging applications (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger); I am not concerned about any of these; Don't know. *Global average among 33 countries (see methodology). [Base: N=66,090]

## FACEBOOK USE FOR NEWS FALLS IN MANY COUNTRIES

While Facebook remains the dominant social media platform for news in Australia, its popularity is declining (see **Chapter 5**). This trend is echoed globally. High levels of concern about misinformation may account for some of this drop. Since 2020, the biggest falls were among news audiences in Brazil (-7), Argentina (-9), Hong Kong (-9) and Poland (-10) (see **figure 9.5**). A six percentage point decline was recorded in Italy, Taiwan, Singapore, Australia, and the United States. The use of Facebook for news fell less in countries where the social media platform does not have an established audience using it for news, including Japan, Korea, the UK, and the Netherlands.

**FIGURE 9.5:** FACEBOOK USE FOR NEWS 2020-2021 (%)

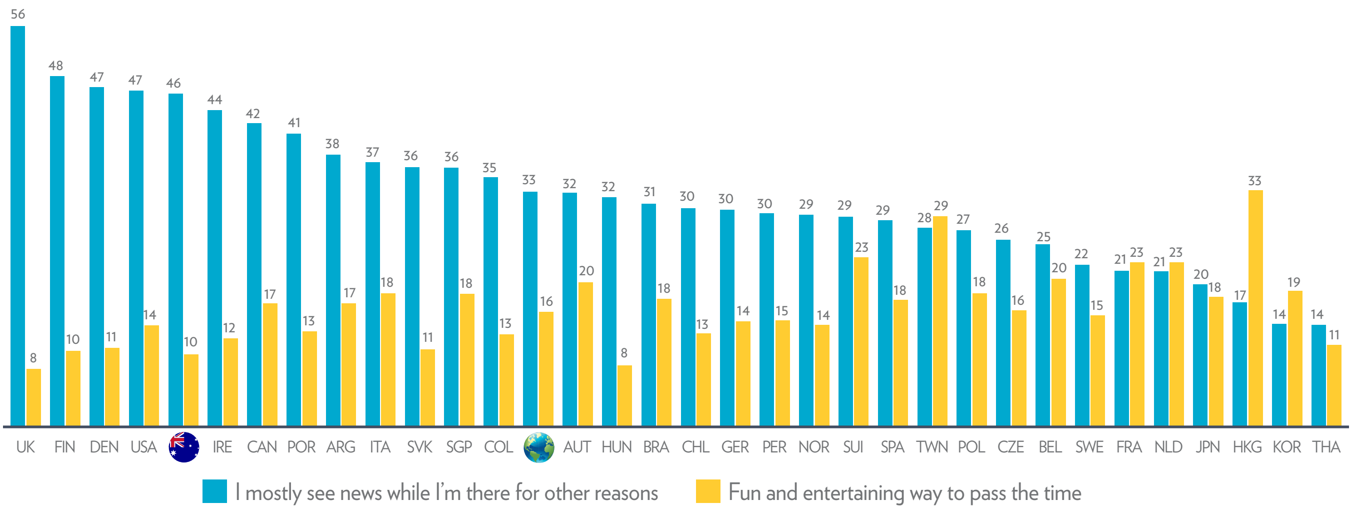



[Q12B] Which, if any, of the following have you used for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week? *Global average among 33 countries (see methodology). [Base 2020 (N=60,027), 2021 (N=66,092)]

## GLOBALLY, CONSUMERS MAINLY SEE NEWS ON FACEBOOK INCIDENTALLY RATHER THAN SEEKING IT OUT INTENTIONALLY

This year we asked respondents their main reason for using Facebook for news. Globally, Facebook is the most popular. But audiences are more likely to say they consume news on the platform incidentally while they are there for other reasons (see **figure 9.6**). In this regard, Australians who use Facebook for news are more likely to find news incidentally (46%) than the global average of 33%. In Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan, audiences are more likely to say they get news from Facebook because it is a fun and entertaining way to pass the time.

**FIGURE 9.6:** MOTIVATION FOR USING FACEBOOK FOR NEWS (%)

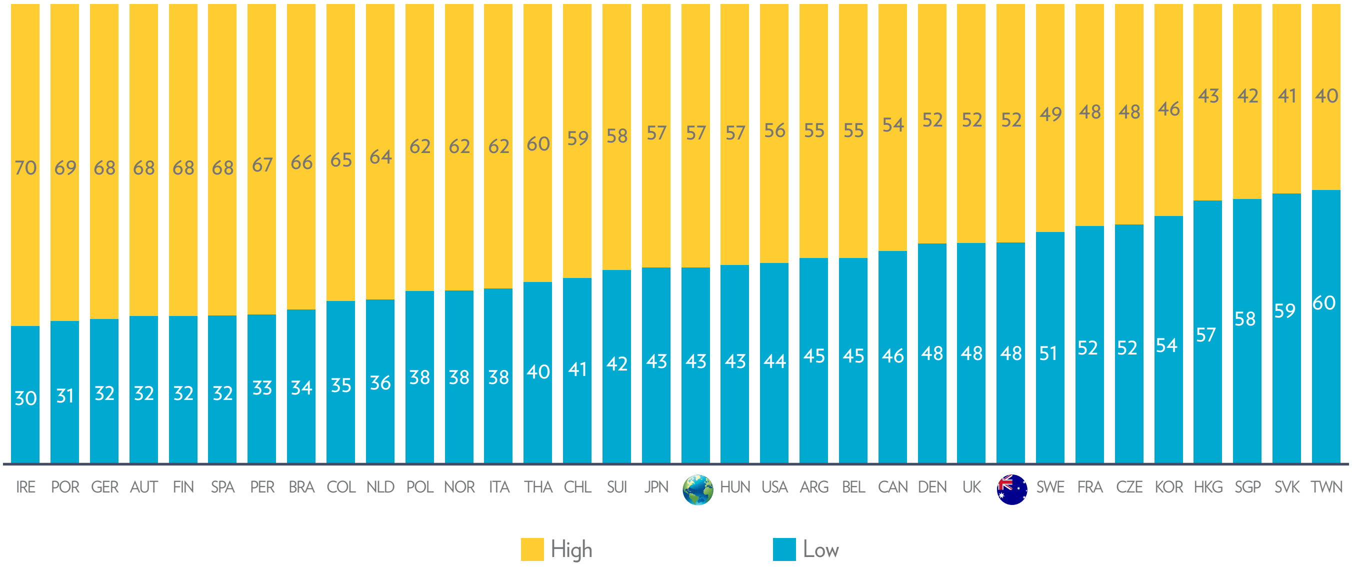



[Q12_Social_motivations] You said that you use [Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat] for news... What is the MAIN reason that you use <NETWORK> for news? Good place to get the very latest news; Gives me perspectives not available in mainstream media; Enjoy the debate and comments alongside the news; Fun and entertaining way to pass the time; Gives me news that is personally important to me; I mostly see news while I'm there for other reasons; Don't know; None of these. *Global average among 33 countries (see methodology). [Base: N=19,438]

## AUSTRALIANS ARE STILL LESS INTERESTED IN NEWS THAN AUDIENCES IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Australians continue to be less interested in the news than consumers in other countries. Just over half of Australians say they are 'somewhat' or 'very' interested in the news (52%), which is lower than the global average (57%), and considerably lower than audiences in Ireland (70%), Portugal (69%) and Germany (68%) (see **figure 9.7**). Interest in news has been steadily declining among Australian news consumers since 2016 (see **Chapter 4**).

**FIGURE 9.7:** INTEREST IN NEWS (%)



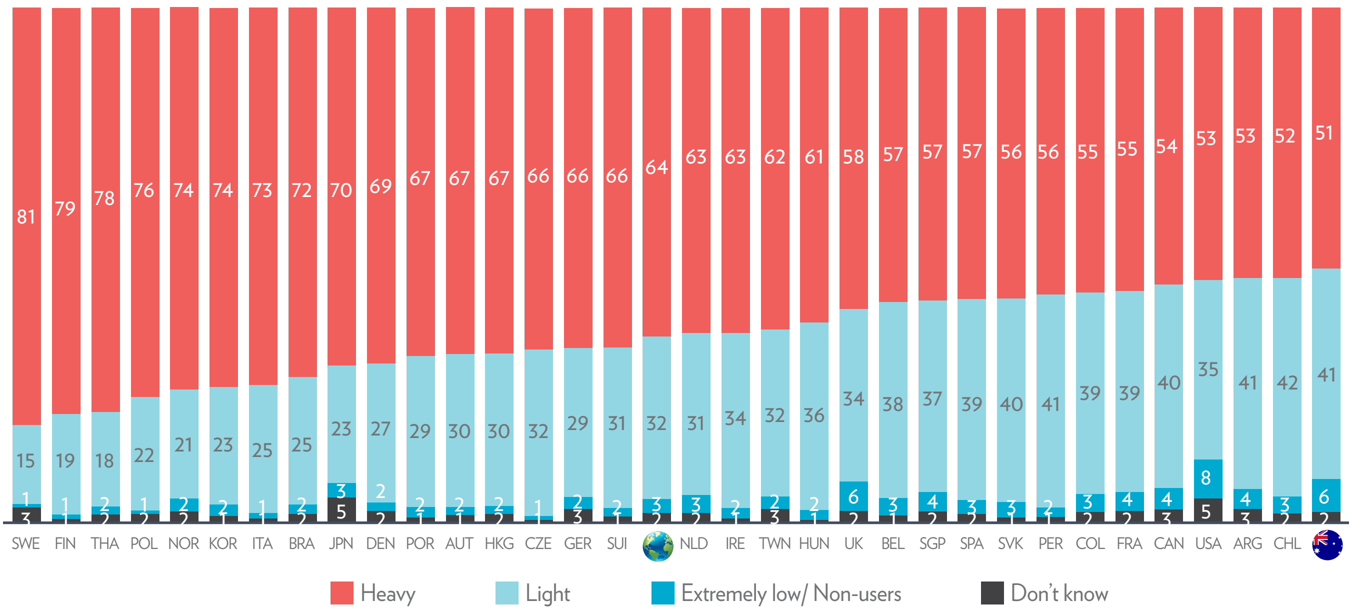

[Q1c] How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news? Extremely interested; Very interested; Somewhat interested; Not very interested; Not at all interested. *Excluded 'Don't know'. *Global average among 33 countries (see methodology). [Base: N=65,544]

## AUSTRALIANS RETURN AS THE LIGHTEST NEWS CONSUMERS IN THE WORLD

In addition to reporting low levels of interest in news, Australians continue to be among the lightest news consumers in the world. In 2021, Australia has the lowest number of heavy news consumers (51%), which is 13 percentage points lower than the global average. The lower levels of news interest and consumption in Australia may help to explain why the experience of COVID-19 misinformation is low compared to other countries.

This year, the survey included extremely low and non news consumers who say they have accessed news less than once a month or never. Along with the UK, Australia records the second largest number of this group (6%). The US has the largest number of extremely low and non news consumers (8%) (see **figure 9.8**).

**FIGURE 9.8:** NEWS ACCESS (%)

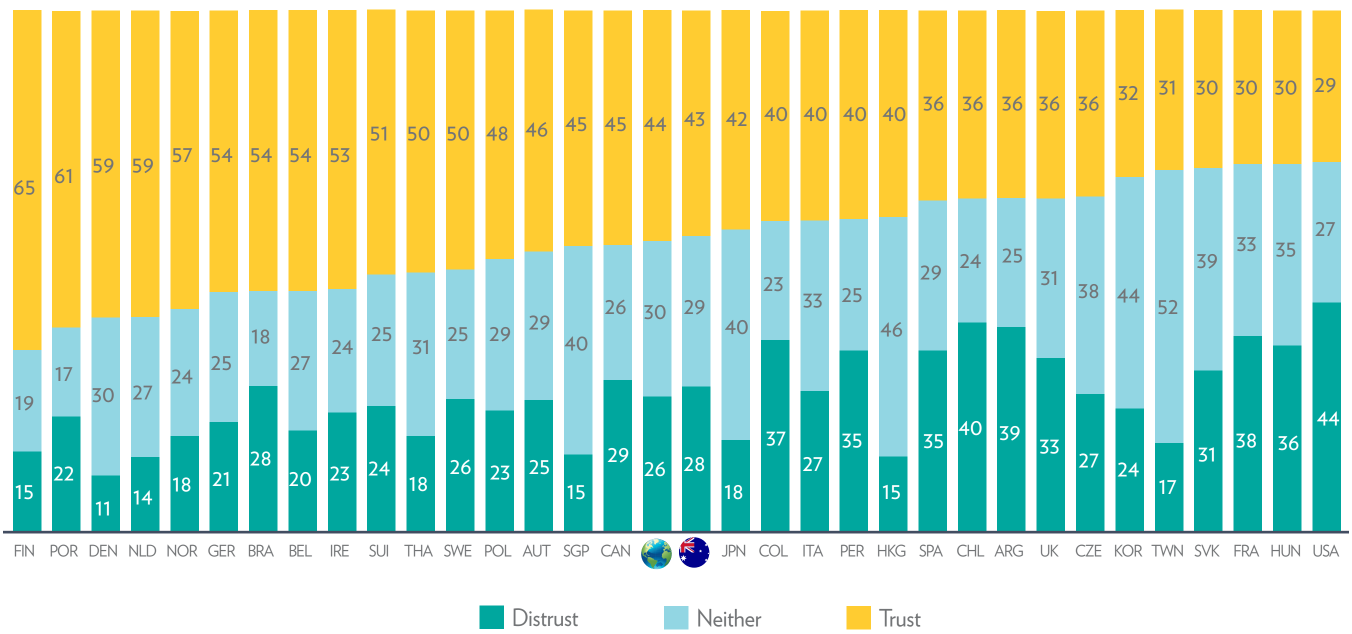



[Q1b_NEW] Typically, how often do you access news? By news we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper or online; More than 10 times a day; Between 6 and 10 times a day; Between 2 and 5 times a day; Once a day; 4-6 days a week; 2-3 days a week; Once a week; Less often than once a week; Less often than once a month; Never; Don't know. Heavy users are those who access news more than once a day. Light users are those who access news between once a day and less than once a week. *Global average among 33 countries (see methodology). [Base: N=66,090]

## TRUST IN NEWS HAS RISEN GLOBALLY

In **Chapter 6**, we discussed a rise in trust among Australian news consumers from 2020 levels, peaking during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID 'trust bump' is part of a global trend that has seen levels of trust in news rise in several countries. Since last year, the global average for trust in news has risen from 38% in 2020 to 44%. Australia remains close to the global average, with 43% of participants agreeing they trust most news most of the time. Finland has reclaimed first position for the country with the highest trust in news, rising to 65% (+8). In the Asia-Pacific region, trust rose substantially in Singapore (+9), Hong Kong (+10), Chile (+6), Korea (+11) and Taiwan (+7) in the past year (see **figure 9.9**). Notable exceptions to this trend include the United States and Canada, which recorded almost no change in trust. For many countries, the COVID 'trust bump' did not translate into an increase in trust in news on social media. This likely reflects a global concern about social media platforms, particularly Facebook, as prominent sources of false or misleading information.

**FIGURE 9.9:** TRUST IN NEWS (%)




[6_2016_6] Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: I think I can trust most of the news I consume most of the time. Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree. *Global average of 33 countries (see methodology). [Base: N=66,090]

## SUMMARY

Compared with audiences internationally, Australians say COVID-19 did not have a significant impact on their lives. There is no doubt this is partly due to quick action taken by governments and health officials to contain the spread of the virus resulting in fewer case numbers and deaths. However, with the widespread use of online and social media news sources, many Australians can relate to the global context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our ability to see and engage with news from around the world has provided Australian audiences with some perspective about how devastating the virus has been in other countries. At the time of publication, the death toll worldwide had passed 3.3 million, with more than 160 million confirmed cases.[1]

While Australia has fared better than most other countries, the data show that we are still aware of and concerned about the quality of information about the virus. Sixty-four percent are worried about misinformation generally, and 30% are specifically concerned about false or misleading information about COVID-19 on Facebook. On both measures, the level of concern among Australians is above the global average. However, the degree of concern is disproportionate to peoples' actual experiences of misinformation. In this survey, 38% of Australians say they have encountered false and misleading information about COVID-19 in the past week. While this is much lower than in other countries it suggests many are aware of and have been exposed to misinformation about the virus.[2]

In times of crisis Australians turn to trusted sources of news. Our research conducted in April 2020 found that trust and news consumption increased substantially as consumers sought to make sense of the deluge of information about the virus.

Despite this Australians remain steadfast in their level of disengagement from news. As well as being the lightest news, consumers in the world, only half of Australians have high interest in news (52%). Six percent of Australians say they access news less often than once a month or never. While on Facebook, almost half of Australians who use the platform for news (46%) say they are consuming news incidentally and mostly because they are on the platform for other reasons.

The data show news consumption appears to have returned to pre-COVID levels. The COVID-19 'trust bump' was also not maintained, the number of news consumers paying for news remains low, and people are mostly unaware of the financial crisis in the news industry. Given the financial uncertainty facing the local news industry, for news organisations 2020 may turn out to be a missed opportunity.


[1] World Health Organisation. 2021. WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard. Accessed May 15, 2021. https://covid19.who.int/

[2] Park, S., Fisher, C., Lee, J. and McGuinness, K. (2020). *COVID-19: Australian news and misinformation.* Canberra: University of Canberra, News & Media Research Centre. https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-07/apo-nid306728.pdf

# COMMENTARY

## LONG COVID AND THE MEDIA: WHAT WILL BE THE LASTING IMPACT ON JOURNALISM?

**Nic Newman**, Senior Research Associate, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

More than a year after it began, the Coronavirus pandemic continues to cast a dark cloud over the health of our communities – as well as that of the news industry. Across the world, historic titles are being closed, and journalists are being laid-off, as advertisers take fright in the face of a global economic downturn. And yet, this year's survey also finds evidence that some brands have benefitted from a desire for reliable information around the pandemic – both in terms of higher reach, higher trust, and more paying subscribers.

It is important to note that our previous survey captured a moment in time pre pandemic (January 2020), and a year later we captured another, when the impact of Coronavirus still varied considerably across countries. In the intervening time we know that most news brands reported at various times, vastly increased usage. Television news in particular saw its biggest audiences for years, especially during the first months of the crisis. But our data suggest that consumption now has reverted to a more normal pattern with interest in the news, in most countries, no higher than a year ago.

### SOME TRUSTED BRANDS HAVE DONE BETTER ONLINE

In Northern and Western Europe, in particular, some commercial and public service news brands continue to attract larger online audiences than they did a year before – and these tend to be those with a higher level of trust. In Norway, for example VG (Verdens Gang) gained nine percentage points, n-tv in Germany gained four, while MTV News in Finland was up by seven on the year before. Public Service media websites have also performed particularly well, perhaps because they have been able to use their reach via TV and radio to promote more detailed information online. Our survey shows ABC overtaking News.com.au in online reach this year, and opening up a bigger gap with other providers – while remaining the most trusted Australian news brand. The Coronavirus story seems to have played to the strengths of public media's fact based and specialised coverage and online coverage has included extensive breakdowns of Coronavirus data, daily COVID newsletters, and explanatory podcasts.

| | Online reach | YoY change |
|---|---|---|
| NRK News (Norway) | 42% | +8 |
| YLE (Finland) | 44% | +5 |
| SVT (Sweden) | 34% | +3 |
| RTÉ News (Ireland) | 41% | +8 |
| BBC News (UK) | 46% | +1 |
| ALL (Average of 14 PSBs) | 32% | +3 |

This has given a boost to a sector whose legitimacy and funding have been threatened by a combination of changing consumer behaviour and reduced funding by politicians. Before the crisis, for example, Boris Johnson's Conservative government in the UK was considering turning the BBC into a subscription operation, now MPs are recommending any change to funding arrangements should be shelved until at least 2038.[1]

### TRUST IN THE NEWS UP SIGNIFICANTLY

More widely it seems that the crisis has restored some confidence in the news media, after a period which has seen attacks by populist politicians, and the rise of unreliable information often distributed via social media. Trust in the news (44%) is up six percentage points on average and considerably more than that in some countries. This may be because Coronavirus has made the news seem more straightforward and fact-based at the same time as squeezing out more partisan political news in some countries. The United States is clearly an exception following deep divisions over a 'stolen election' and the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd. The US, Mexico and Turkey are the only countries not to have seen an increase in trust this year.

We also find a growing *trust gap* between the news sources people generally rely on and the news they find in social media and search, which has remained unchanged on a like for like basis.[2]

None of this provides any cause for complacency. Just half say they trust the news they use themselves and the numbers are much lower in politically and socially divided societies. These gains only partially reverse falls

[1] https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/mar/25/television-licence-fee-preferred-option-fund-bbc-2038-mps

[2] Taking the same 40 countries polled in 2020 we find trust in news at 43% (up five) and trust in social media unchanged at 22% and in search at 32%.

in trust in the news over the last few years and concern about false and misleading information remains higher than ever. The majority of our global sample (58%) say that have seen false or misleading misinformation about COVID-19 or other health issues in the last week – higher in parts of Africa and Latin America.

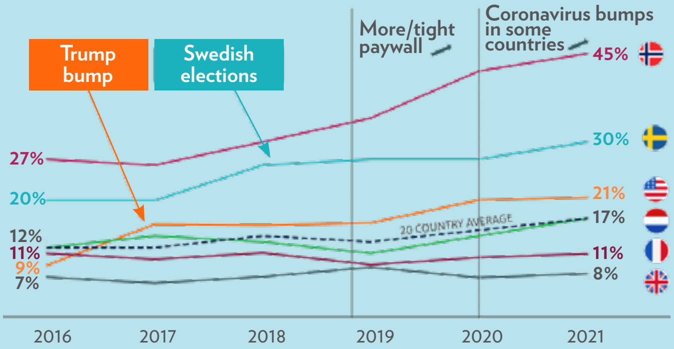
The pandemic has also caused search and social media platforms to show a much tougher approach to taking down damaging and harmful content – especially with lives at stake. They have also showcased reliable sources of information about COVID – including official statistics and well trusted news brands. This greater premium on trusted sources in platform environments is likely to continue long after COVID has retreated.

## CAN MORE TRUST, TRANSLATE INTO REVENUE?

For many publishers COVID-19, has also led to an acceleration of plans to get readers to pay for content online – via subscription or donation models. *El Pais* in Spain, *El Tiempo* in Colombia and News 24 in South Africa are amongst those to have started their paywall journeys in the midst of the pandemic. Other news organisations have reported significant Covid bumps over the last year – including an extra million digital subscribers for the New York Times. The Guardian, which has a growing audience in Australia and the United States, says it gained more than 250,000 digital subscriptions and recurring contributions in 2020, an increase of 43%.

We find most success in a small number of wealthy countries with a long history of high levels of print newspaper subscriptions, such as Norway 45% (+3), Sweden 30% (+3), Switzerland (+4), and the Netherlands 17% (+3). Around a fifth (21%) now pay for at least one online news outlet in the United States, 20% in Finland, and 13% in Australia. By contrast, just 9% say they pay in Germany and 8% in the UK.

PROPORTION THAT PAID FOR ANY ONLINE NEWS IN THE LAST YEAR (2016-21) SELECTED MARKETS




Q7a. Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service in the last year? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription or one-off payment for an article or app or e-edition). *Base: Total 2016-21 samples in each market (most n ≈ 2000). Note: 20 market average includes USA, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Canada, Australia, Japan, Poland.*

But with more content going behind paywalls, the pandemic has also raised fears about growing information inequality. In any future health crisis, will those who can afford it get better quality information than those who can't? Some publishers have given away pandemic related content for free while others are looking at cheap deals for students and the unemployed. Recent deals between Facebook, Google and publishers in Australia and Europe also raise intriguing questions about how paywall models can be combined with what looks like a trend towards more *free* content distributed by platforms.

## DIGITAL HABITS ARE CHANGING

Many older people have embraced new digital platforms for the first time, during this crisis, enjoying the convenience of shopping online and video conferencing for the first time. Subscription services of all types have boomed– especially entertainment streaming services like Netflix. News may be able to ride on the back of this trend but as household budgets tighten, they may also struggle to keep customers, let alone win new ones. After this shock, many publishers will be looking at ways to be less dependent on any one source of revenue – looking for new opportunities that come out of any period of rapid change.

Our own data also shows that people have relied even more on the smartphone for communicating with friends but also for accessing news (73% weekly use). This shift, which has been underway for some time, nevertheless has major implications for the formats of news. Beautifully presented visual updates, short videos have all performed well during the crisis as have mobile-first social networks like TikTok and Instagram – used both to distract and entertain. Audio's own digital revolution has gathered paces with a further explosion of creativity around podcasts as radio listening in cars dipped during lockdowns. News organisations will need to focus even more on creating engaging digital and multimedia formats in the future.

Year after year our survey has documented the shift towards more digital, social, and mobile consumption – slowly chipping away at the business models as well as the confidence of many media companies. Now the shock of COVID-19 combined with accelerating technological change is bringing things to a head – forcing a more fundamental rethink about how journalism should operate in the next decade, as a business, in terms of technology, but also as a profession.

# GENDER SNAPSHOT

MALE
FEMALE

## NEWS ACCESS

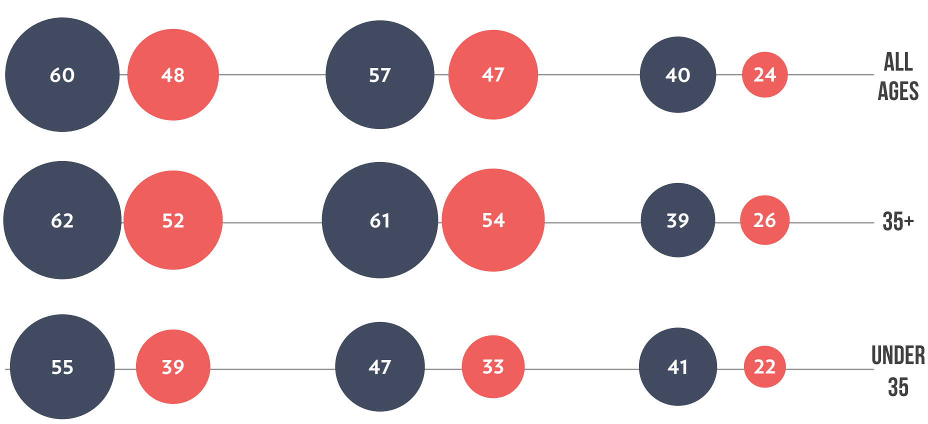
Heavy news users (%)

## INTEREST IN NEWS

High interest in news (%)

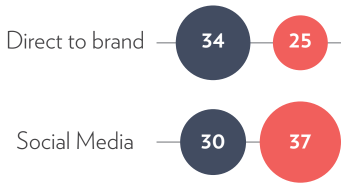
## INTEREST IN POLITICS

High interest in politics (%)




## PATHWAYS TO ACCESS NEWS

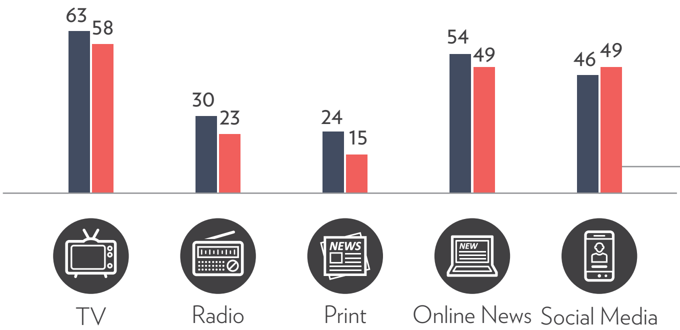
Pathways to online news (%)




Women are more likely to come across news on social media, whereas men are more likely to go directly to news websites or apps

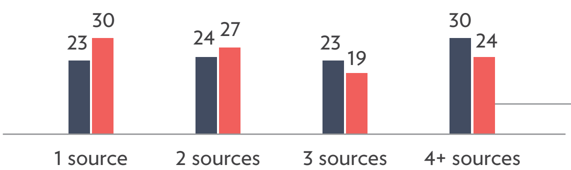
## SOURCES OF NEWS

General sources of news (%)




Women are more likely than men to use social media to access news

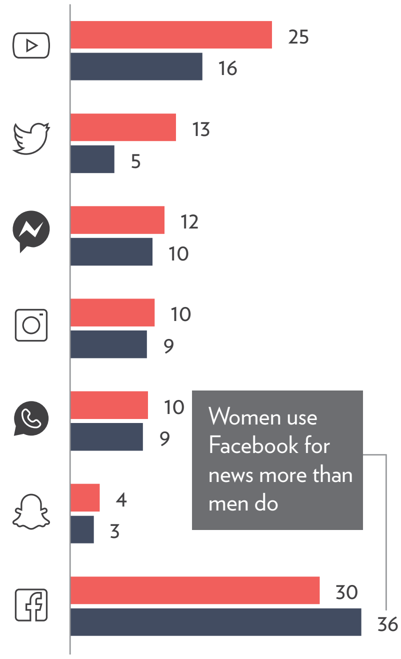
Number of sources used for news (%)




Women use fewer mediums to access news than men

## SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NEWS

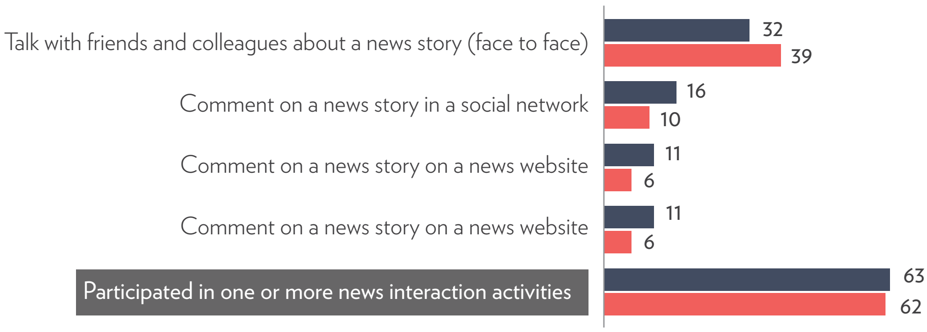
Social media platforms for news (%)




Women use Facebook for news more than men do

## NEWS INTERACTION

How do women interact with news? (%)



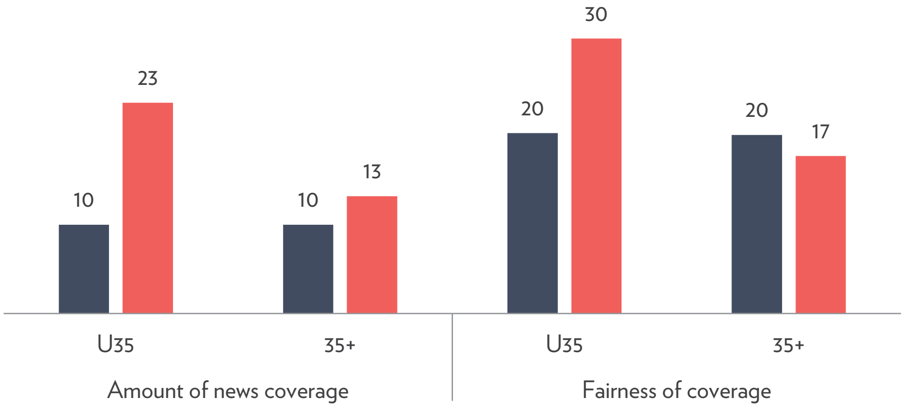

## NEWS BRANDS

Top 6 TV news (%)

| | Male | | Female |
|---|---|---|---|
| Channel 7 | 38 | < | **39** |
| Channel 9 | 35 | < | **37** |
| Channel TEN | 18 | < | **20** |
| SBS TV | **15** | > | 14 |
| ABC TV | **36** | > | 32 |
| Sky News | **12** | > | 8 |

## PERCEPTIONS OF NEWS

Views about the amount and fairness of news coverage (people your gender) (% of those who say 'not enough' and 'unfairly')



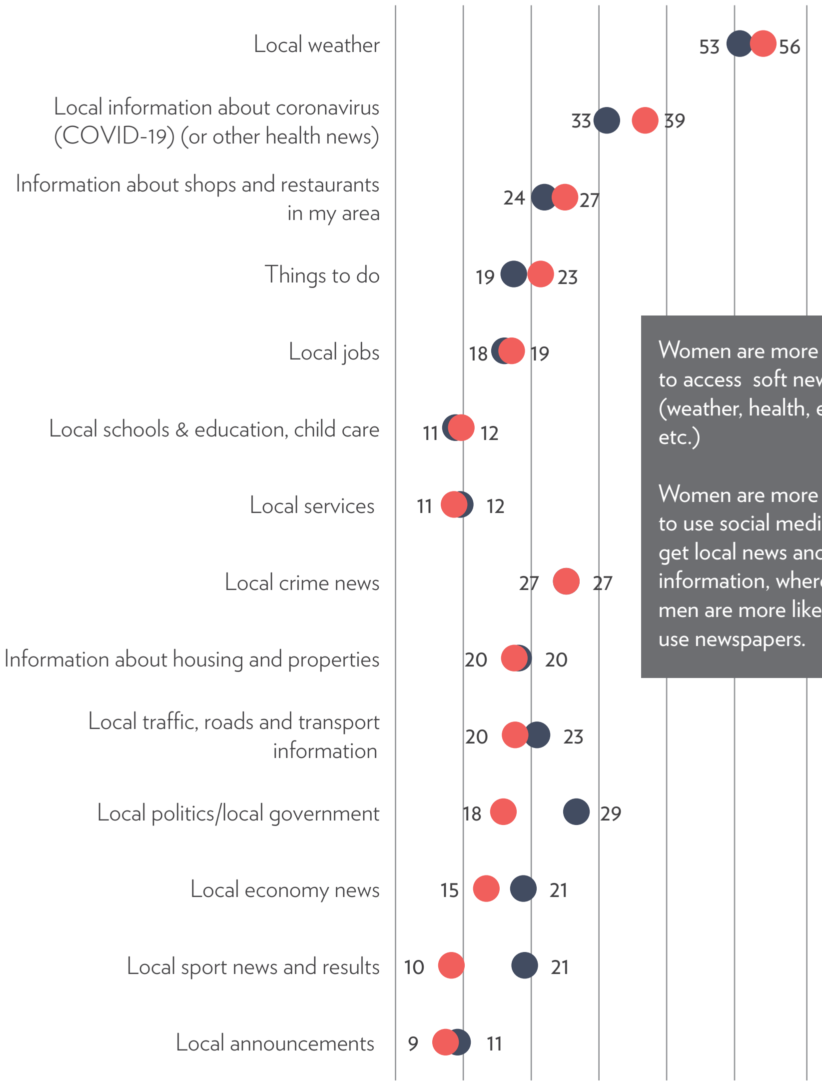

Young women feel the coverage of their gender is insuffcient and unfair

Younger women are more likely to think the news does not provide enough coverage of people their gender and that it is unfair in its coverage

There is no difference in the views between men aged under 35 and 35+.

## LOCAL NEWS

Local news topics (%)




Women are more likely to access soft news (weather, health, event, etc.)

Women are more likely to use social media to get local news and information, whereas men are more likely to use newspapers.

## PAYING FOR NEWS

News payment (%)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pay now | **16** | > | 11 |
| Likely to pay in 12 months | **14** | > | 11 |

Concern about financial state of commercial news (%)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Not concerned | **53** | > | 44 |
| Concerned | **35** | > | 33 |
| Don't know | 13 | < | **23** |

Knowledge of financial state of commercial news (%)

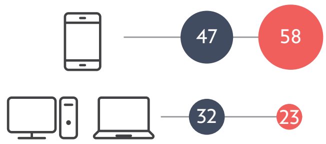
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aware | **38** | > | 29 |
| Unaware | **31** | > | 21 |
| Don't know | 38 | < | **50** |

Support for government to financially support commercial news (%)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| No, they should not | **54** | > | 36 |
| Yes, they should | 23 | < | **24** |
| Don't know | 23 | < | **41** |

## DEVICE FOR NEWS

Main device used for news (%)

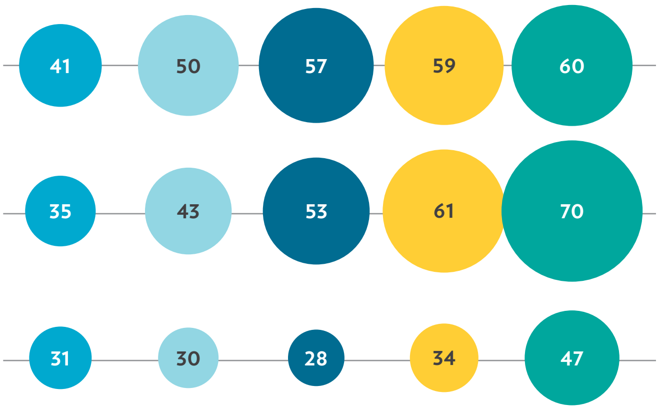



Women are more likely than men to rely on mobile phones to access news

# **GENERATION**
# SNAPSHOT

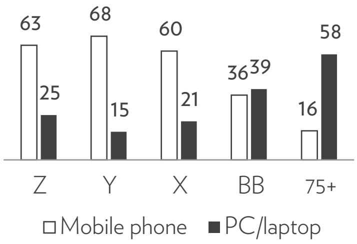
Z Y X BB 75+

## NEWS ACCESS, INTEREST IN NEWS AND INTEREST IN POLITICS




## DEVICE FOR NEWS

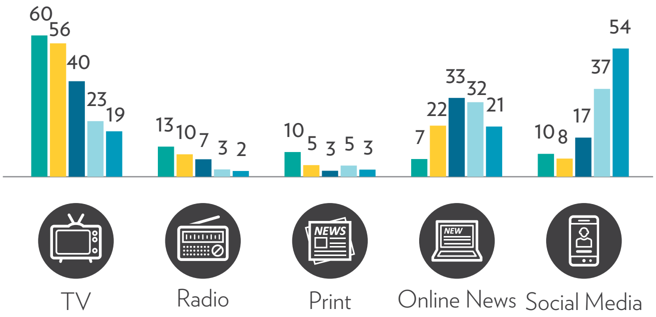
Main device used for news (%)




Younger generations are much more likely to rely on mobile phones to access news whereas the majority of 75+ rely on computers. Baby Boomers are evenly split between mobile (36%) and PC (39%).

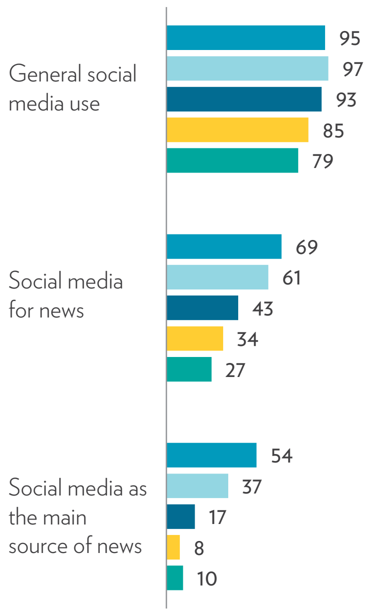
## SOURCES OF NEWS

Main sources of news (%)

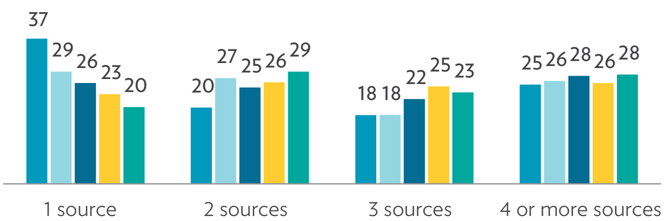



More than half of Gen Z use social media as their main source of news, whereas one in ten among 75+ use social media as their main source of news.

Social media use for news (%)



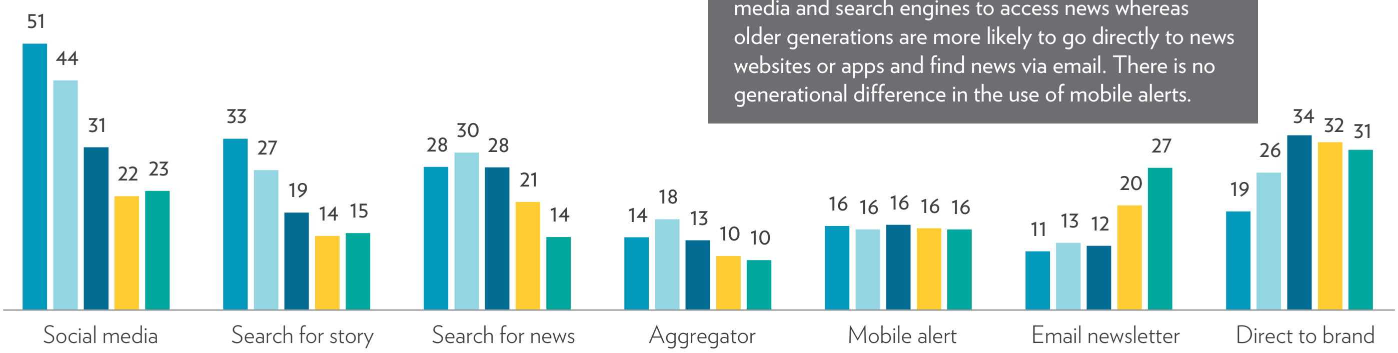

Number of sources used for news (%)




Gen Z are most likely to rely on one medium for news

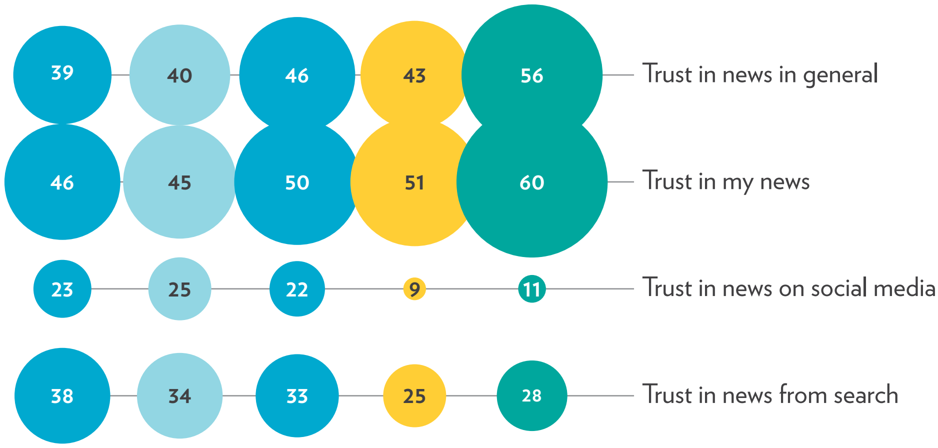
Pathways to online news (%)

Younger generations are more likely to use social media and search engines to access news whereas older generations are more likely to go directly to news websites or apps and find news via email. There is no generational difference in the use of mobile alerts.



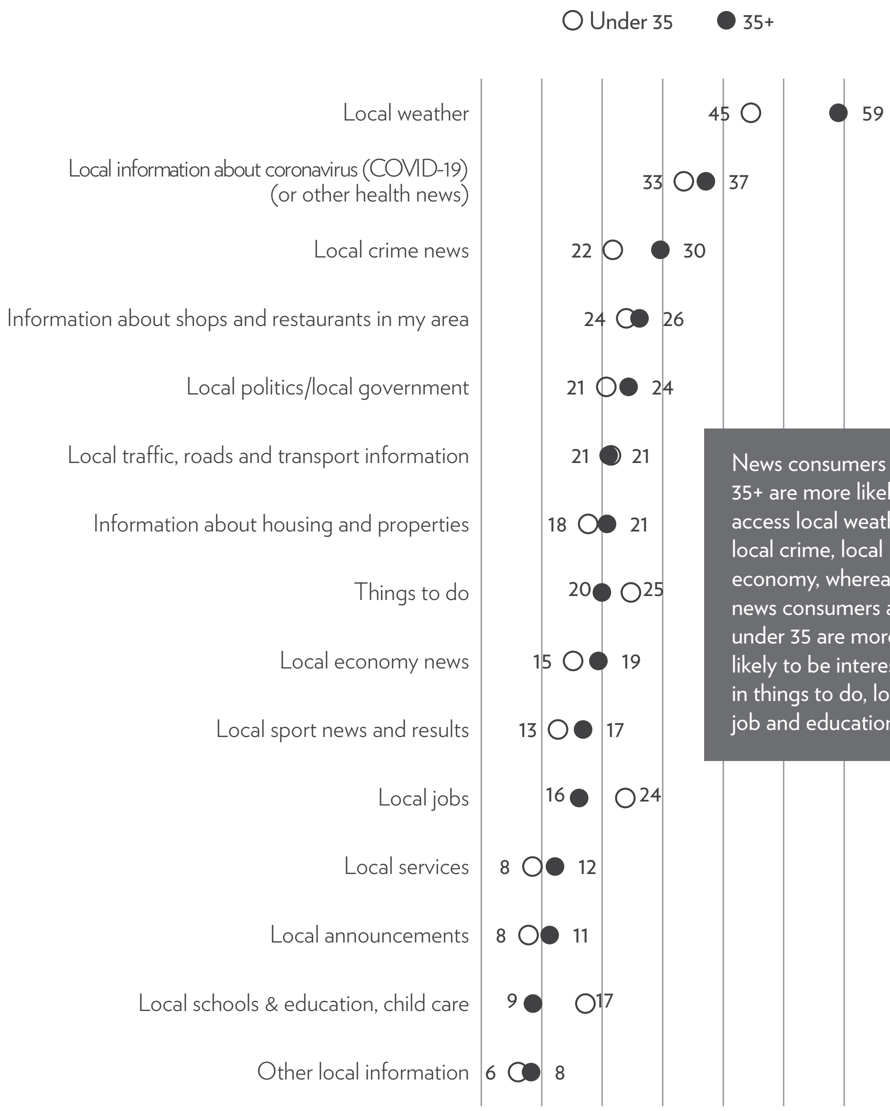
## PERCEPTIONS OF NEWS

Trust in news (%)




## LOCAL NEWS

Local news topics (%)

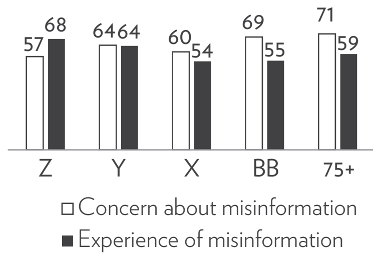



News consumers aged 35+ are more likely to access local weather, local crime, local economy, whereas news consumers aged under 35 are more likely to be interested in things to do, local job and education.

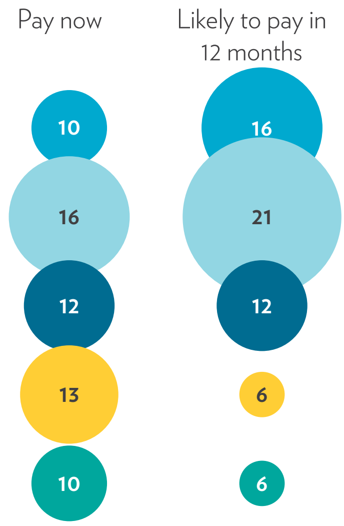
## MISINFORMATION

News consumers aged 75+ are least likely to experience of misinformation but most likely to be concerned about it. In contrast, Gen Z is least concerned about information while they are more likely to encounter misinformation than other generations.

Concern about and experience of misinformation (%)




## PAYING FOR NEWS




Gen Y are most likely to be paying for news now as well as in the future.

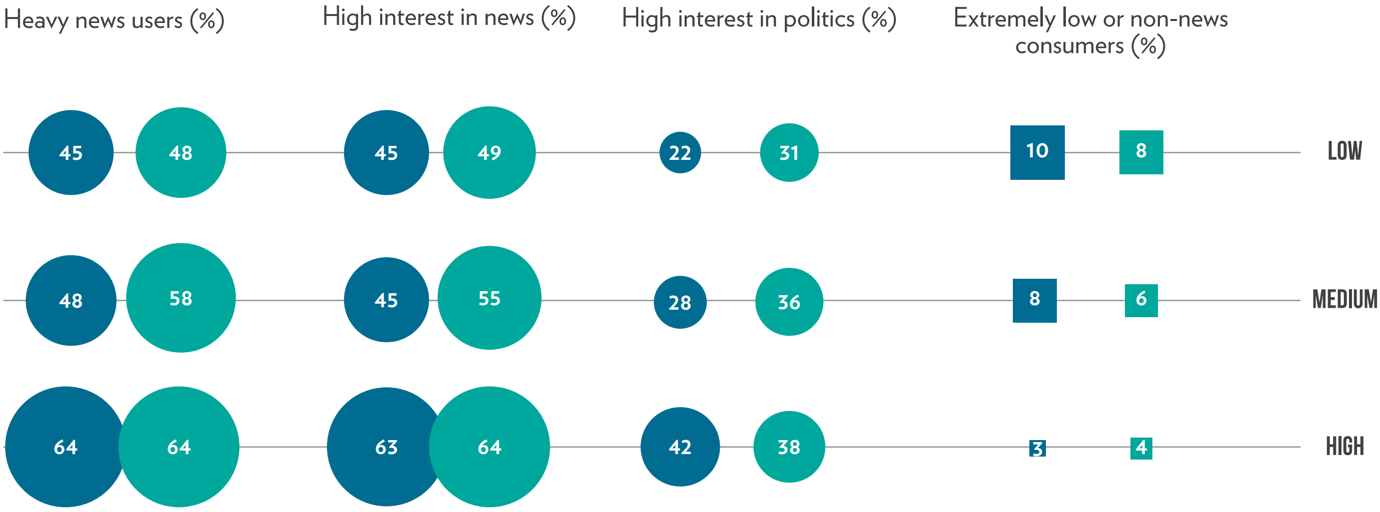
## PODCAST AND NEWS VIDEO

| | Under 35 | | 35+ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Podcast listening | **48** | > | 23 |
| News podcast listening | **18** | > | 8 |
| News video watching | **68** | > | 47 |

# EDUCATION & INCOME SNAPSHOT

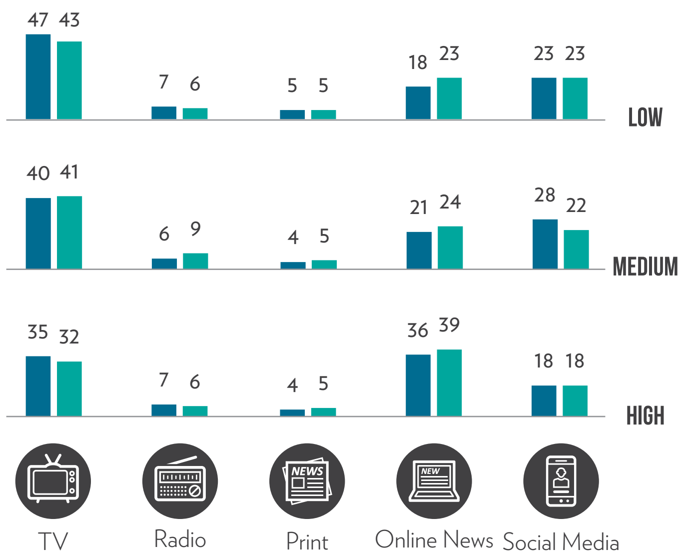
EDUCATION
INCOME

## NEWS ACCESS, INTEREST IN NEWS AND INTEREST IN POLITICS




## SOURCES OF NEWS

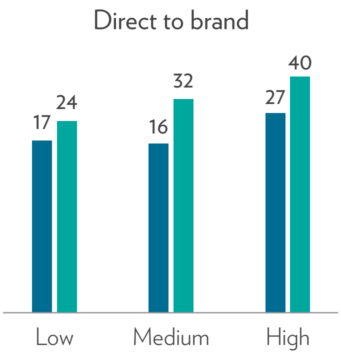
Main sources of news (%)

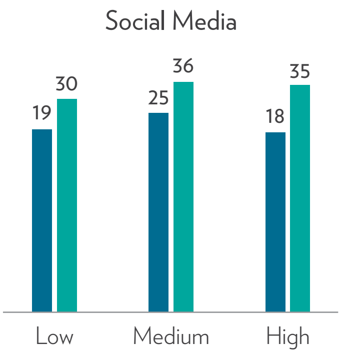



Consumers with low education and low incomes are more likely to rely on TV for news, whereas those with high education and high incomes are far more likely to rely on online news.

## PATHWAYS TO ACCESS NEWS

Pathways to online news (%)




News consumers with high education and incomes are more likely to go directly to news websites or apps.

Those with medium levels of education and income are more likely to come across news on social media.

## DEVICE FOR NEWS

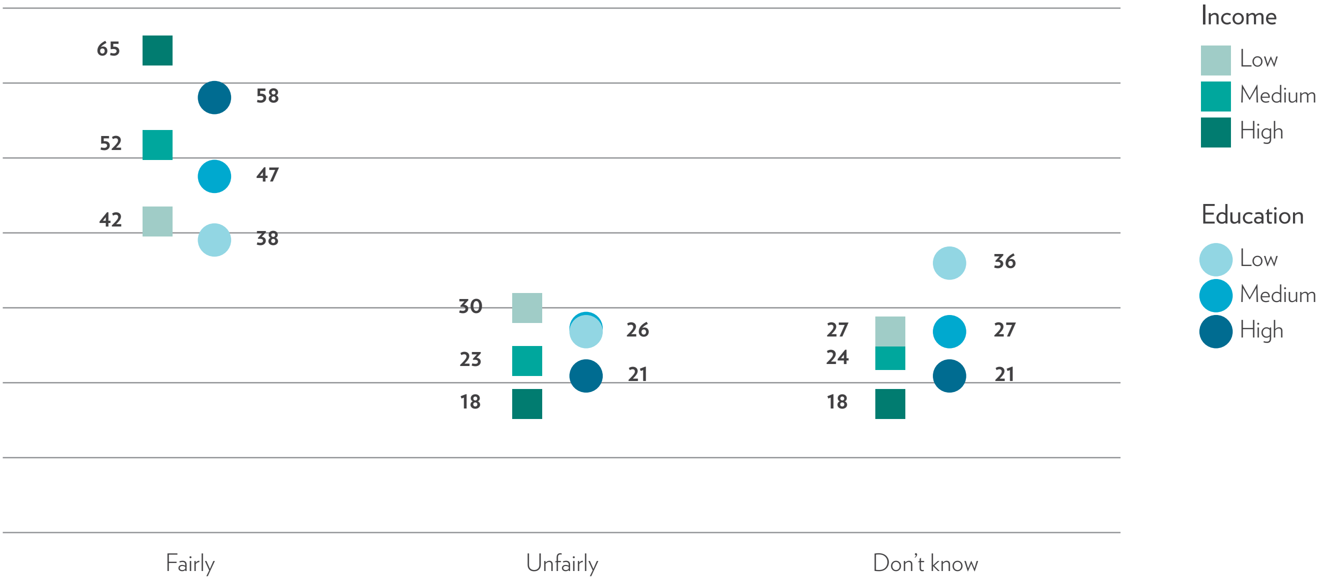
Main device used for news (%)

| | Education | | | Income | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Low | Medium | High | Low | Medium | High |
| Mobile phone | 48 | **54** | 53 | 49 | **50** | 58 |
| PC/ laptop | 24 | **28** | **28** | 29 | **30** | 24 |
| Tablet/ ebook | **14** | 9 | 8 | **10** | 9 | 8 |

High income earners and those with high levels of education are more likely to use mobile phones as their main device for news.

## FAIRNESS OF NEWS COVERAGE

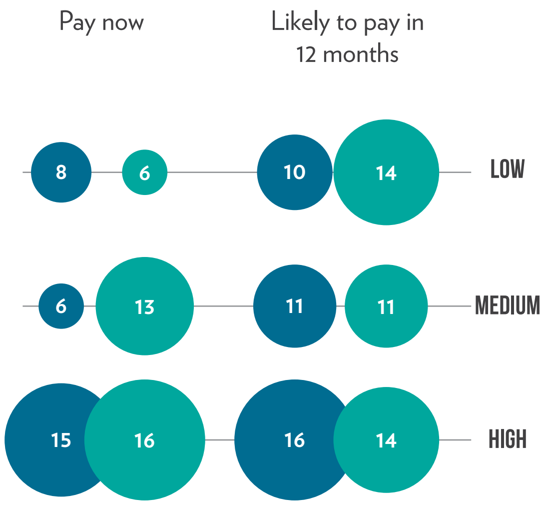
Views about the fairness of news coverage (your social and economic class) (%)



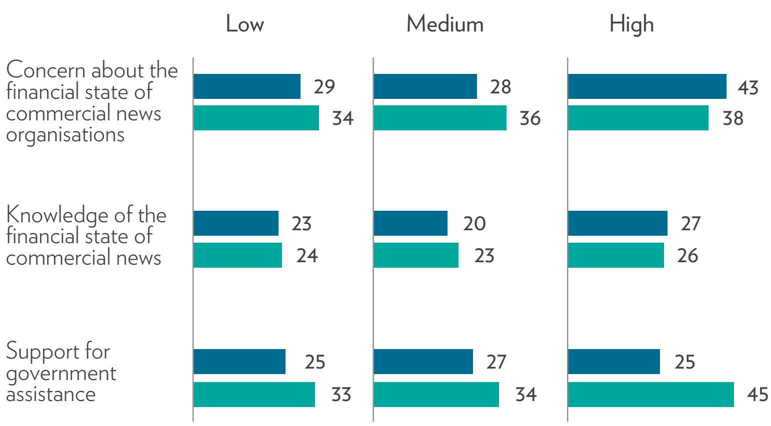

News consumers with high education and incomes are more likely to think the news media represent their social and economic class sufficiently and farily.

One third of news consumers with low education don't know if the amount of media coverage of their social and economic class is sufficent or fair.

## PAYING FOR NEWS AND FUNDING JOURNALISM




Financial state of commercial news — concern, knowledge and support (%)




News consumers with high education and incomes are more likely to pay for news.

Both low income earners and high income earners are more likely to pay for news in the future compared to medium income earners.

News consumers with high education and incomes are more concerned about finalical state of commercial news organisations and aware that the news industry is financially suffering.

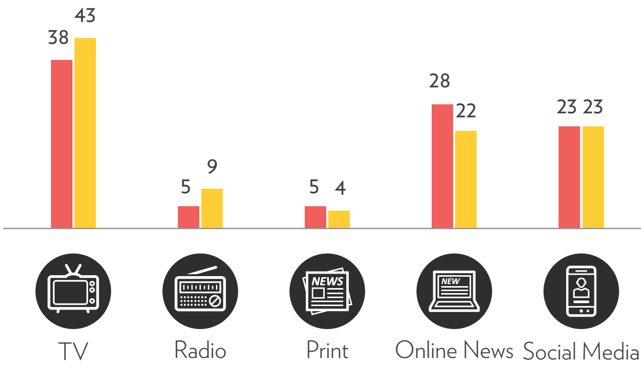
High income earners are much more supportive of the government assisting news organisations compared to medium and low income earners.

# REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

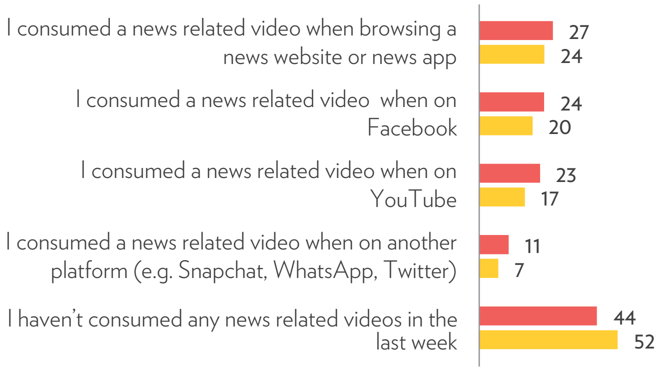
MAJOR CITY
REGIONAL AREA

## SOURCES OF NEWS

Main sources of news (%)



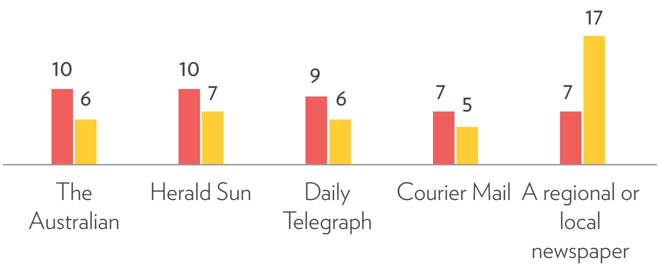

Video news consumption (%)



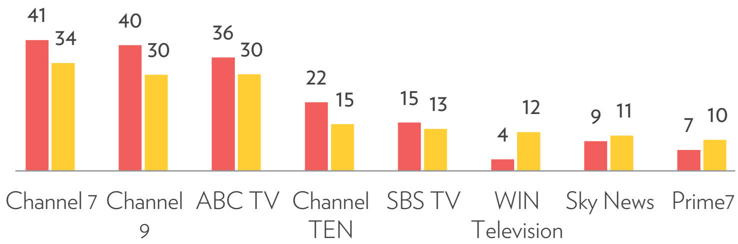

Regional news consumers are more likely to rely on traditional sources of news (TV, Radio) than news consumers in major cities

News videos are less popular among regional news consumers than news consumers in major cities

News brand: newspapers (%)

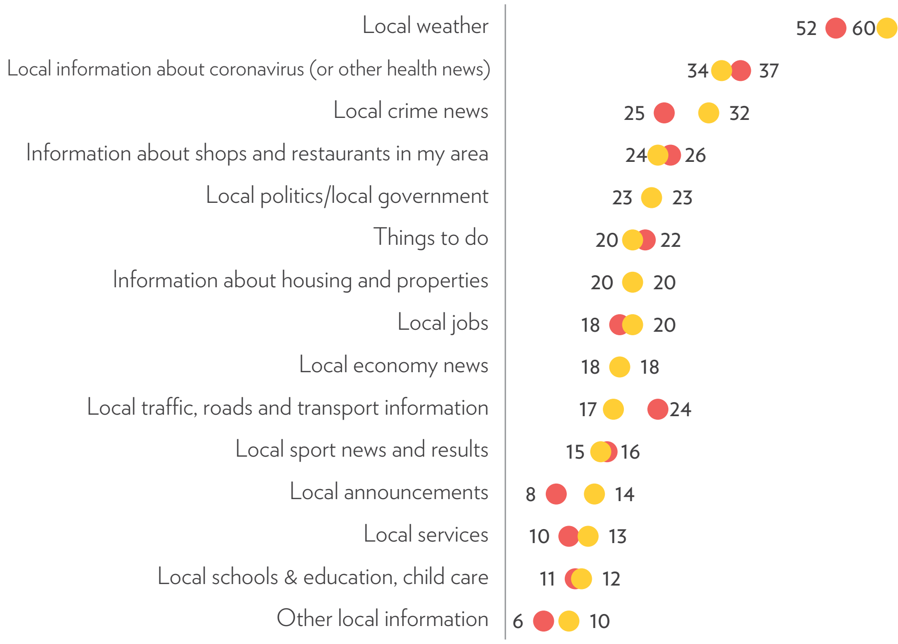



News brands: TV (%)




## LOCAL NEWS

Local news topics (%)

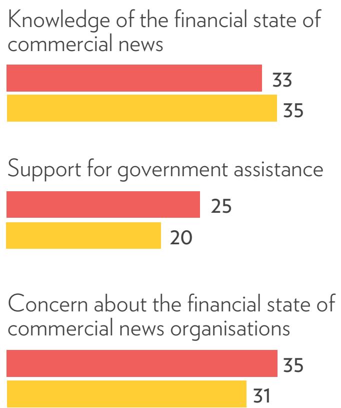



Regional news consumers are more likely to access local news and information about weather, crime, announcements, services, whereas news consumers in major cities access local news and information about COVID-19 and traffic.

## FINANCIAL STATE OF COMMERCIAL NEWS

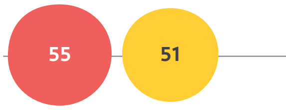
Concern, support and knowledge (%)

News consumers in major cities are more concerned about finalical state of commercial news organisations and supportive of the government assisting news organisations; regional news consumers are slightly more aware that the news industry is financially suffering.



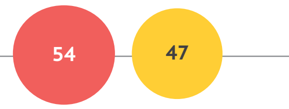
## NEWS ACCESS

Heavy news users (%)



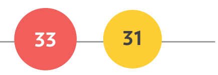

## INTEREST IN NEWS

High interest in news (%)



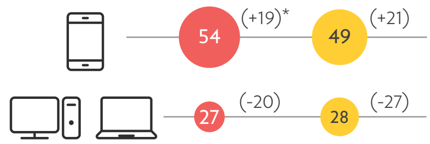

## INTEREST IN POLITICS

High interest in politics (%)




## DEVICE FOR NEWS

Main device used for news (%)

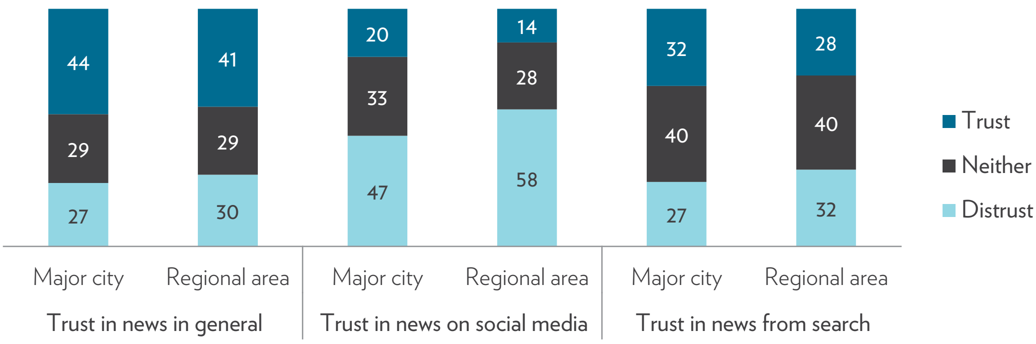



*Changes from 2016 to 2021

Regional news consumers are less likely to rely on mobile phones to access news

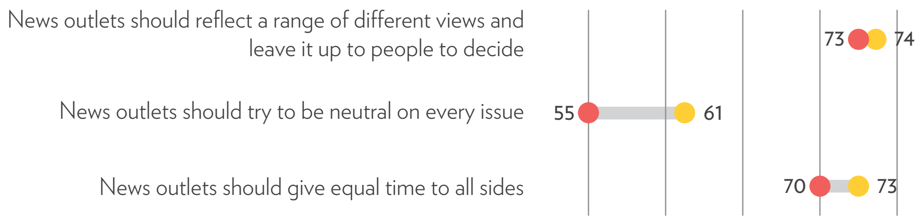
## PERCEPTIONS OF NEWS

Trust in news (%)



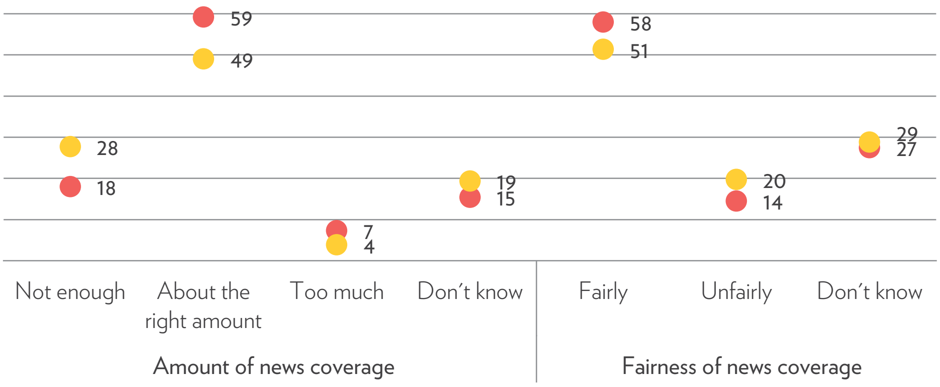

In general, regional news consumers have higher levels of distrust in news than consumers in major cities; the majority of regional news consumers (58%) say they do not trust in news on social media

Attitutde toward impartiality, neutrality and giving equal time (%)



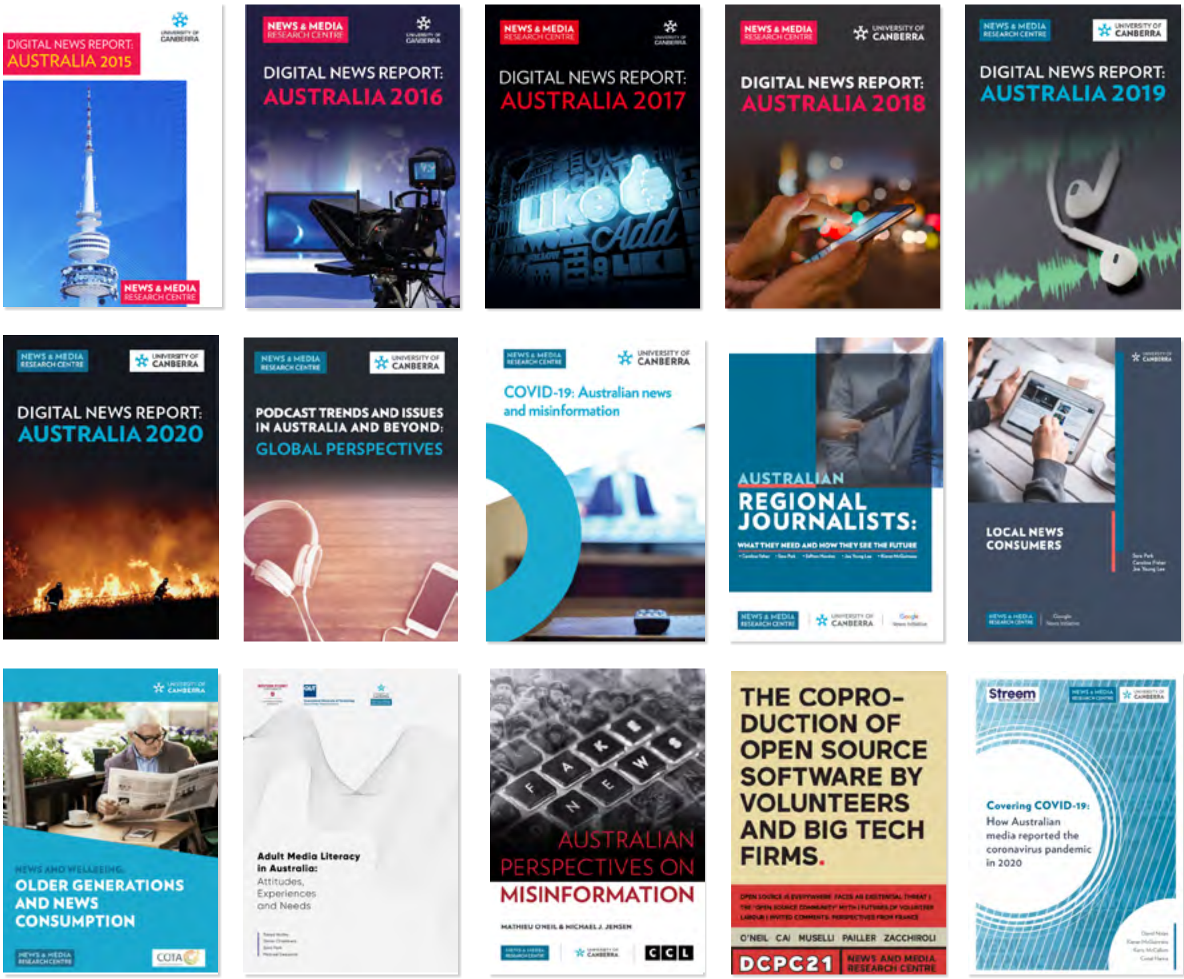

Regional news consumers are more likely to support impartial and neutral news than news consumers in major cities

Views about the amount and fairness of news coverage (where you live) (%)




Regional news consumers are more likely to think the news does not provide enough coverage of their regions and that it is unfair in its coverage

## SELECT REPORTS PUBLISHED BY THE NEWS & MEDIA RESEARCH CENTRE




## BACKGROUND TO THE *DIGITAL NEWS REPORT: AUSTRALIA 2021*

This is the seventh in a series of annual reports which tracks changes in news consumption and attitudes towards news in Australia over time – particularly within the digital space. The study is designed to generate longitudinal evidence of changes in consumer behaviour to assist industry, government and researchers adapt to the rapidly evolving news environment. The Australian study was conducted with approval from University of Canberra Human Research Ethics Committee 14-224.

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## NEWS & MEDIA RESEARCH CENTRE

The News and Media Research Centre (N&MRC) advances public understanding of our changing media environment. It is Australia's only specialist Research Centre dedicated to exploring news consumption, social and digital media networks, and the legal, ethical, and social impacts of communication technologies. Our research occurs in three hubs: the Digital News+ Lab; Critical Conversations Lab; and the Media Cultures Lab. The Centre conducts both critical and applied research projects with partners and institutions in Australia and internationally.

More information at: **www.canberra.edu.au/nmrc**

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Report designed by Ava Wang and Zita Leung

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

**News & Media Research Centre**
**Faculty of Arts & Design**

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CANBERRA ACT 2601
AUSTRALIA

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