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Adult Media Literacy in Australia:

Attitudes,
Experiences
and Needs

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The Institute for Culture and Society (ICS) researches transformations in culture and society in the context of contemporary global change. It champions collaborative engaged research in the humanities and social sciences for a globalising digital age. The Institute is the largest research concentration of its kind in Australia. Located in Parramatta, Australia, at Western Sydney University, the Institute operates a program of events that are both locally and globally oriented.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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.

SUPPORTED BY

This report is part of the Media Literacy in Australia research project, which is administered by Western Sydney University. Initial support for this research project was made possible through a grant from Facebook received by the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) located in the United States, a partner on the project. Facebook did not have any input into this research project's design, methodology, analysis, or findings.

CONTENTS

Executive summary	\ 5
Why we undertook this research	\ 8
Defining media literacy	\ 10
Key findings	\ 12
Reading the data	\ 16
Findings in detail	\ 17
1. Media consumption	\ 18
2. Media consumption profiles	\ 26
3. Familiarity with the term 'media literacy'	\ 30
4. Media abilities	\ 34
5. The media activities people value	\ 39
6. The role of entertainment media in people's lives	\ 46
7. Attitudes toward addressing media issues	\ 51
8. Dealing with offensive media content	\ 56
9. Access to media literacy education and support opportunities	\ 61
10. Attitudes to new technologies and media consumption	\ 66
11. Media use and civic engagement	\ 71
Recommendations	\ 75
Methodology	\ 78
About the authors	\ 79
Acknowledgements	\ 80



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

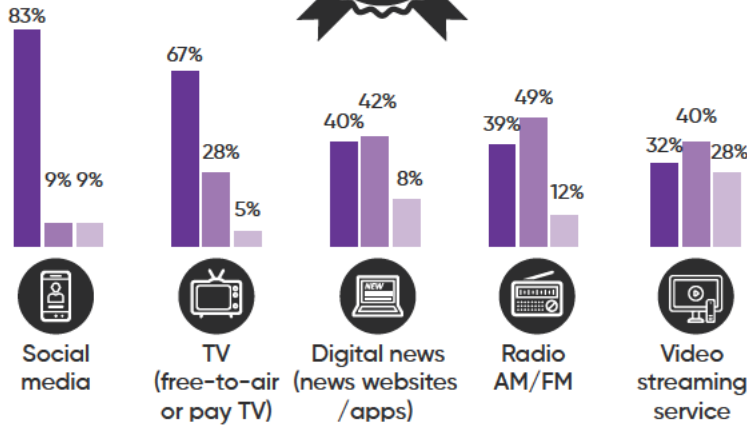
In November and December 2020 we surveyed a sample of 3,510 adult Australians to understand the different types of media they use, the value they place on different media activities, their confidence in their own media abilities and their access to media literacy support. The findings show that most Australians use several different types of media each day, they believe a diverse range of media activities are important in their lives, but their confidence in their own media abilities is unexpectedly low. We also find that far too many Australians don't have access to any media literacy support when they need it. The findings demonstrate that if we accept that media is integral to all aspects of our lives, far more needs to be done to address the needs of groups who are the least confident about their media abilities and who have access to the least support. The findings also show that increasing media literacy can yield direct benefits for increasing people's civic engagement.

ADULT MEDIA LITERACY IN AUSTRALIA

DAILY MEDIA USE

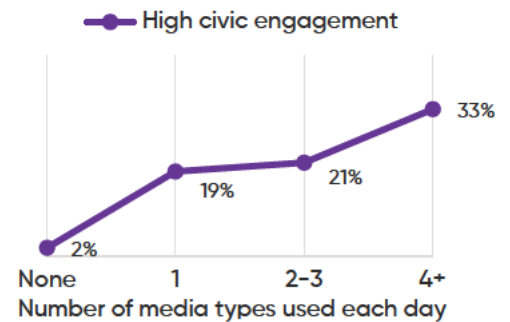


■ Daily users
■ Infrequent users
■ Non users



MEDIA DIET ⇌ CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

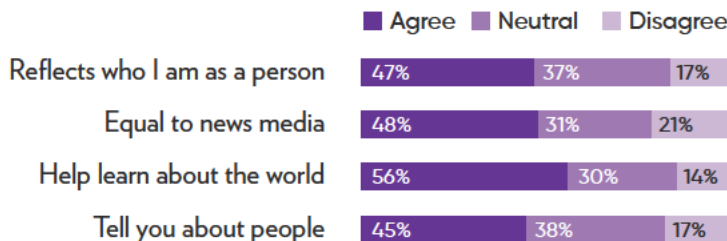
The **more** types of media people use each day, the **higher** their levels of **civic engagement**.



THE ROLE OF ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA



It's not only news and information that inform people. We asked people about the role entertainment media has in their lives...

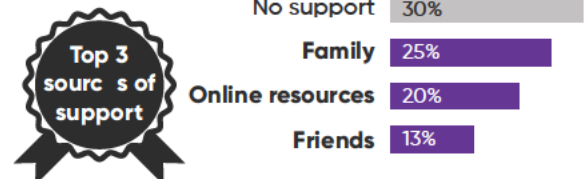


MEDIA LITERACY SUPPORT



Many adults have access to **no** media literacy support, or **very limited** support

We asked people about their level of access to eight sources of support to help them to access, use, understand and create media.

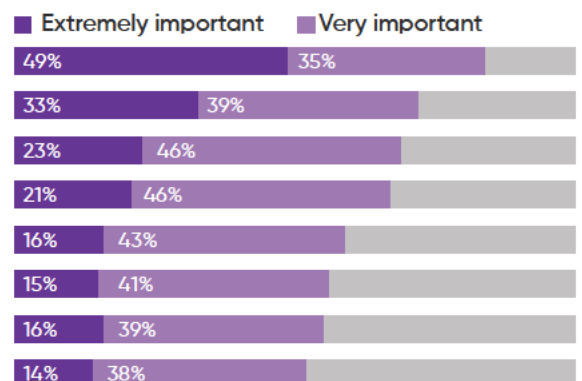


AUSTRALIANS BELIEVE THAT MEDIA LITERACY IS IMPORTANT



More than 50% of adults say the following media abilities are **important** in their life:

- Knowing how to protect myself from scams/predators online
- Using media to stay connected with my friends/family
- Knowing how to think critically about the media I consume
- Knowing how to recognise and prevent misinformation
- Understanding how media impacts and influences society
- Understanding relevant media laws/policies
- Thinking and reflecting on my own media use
- Knowing how to maximise my access to entertainment media



THE GAP IN MEDIA LITERACY

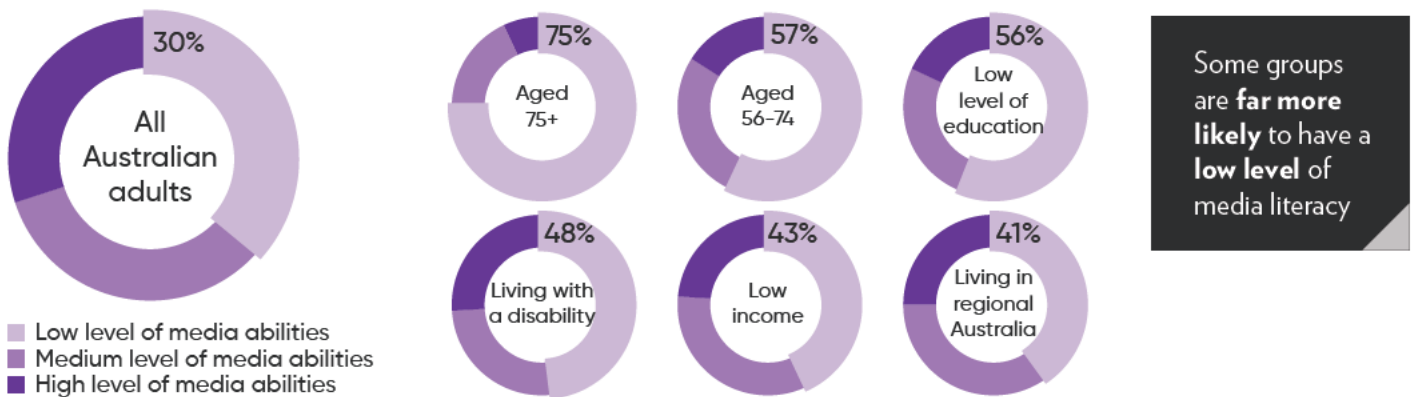


But there are **significant gaps** in people's media literacy

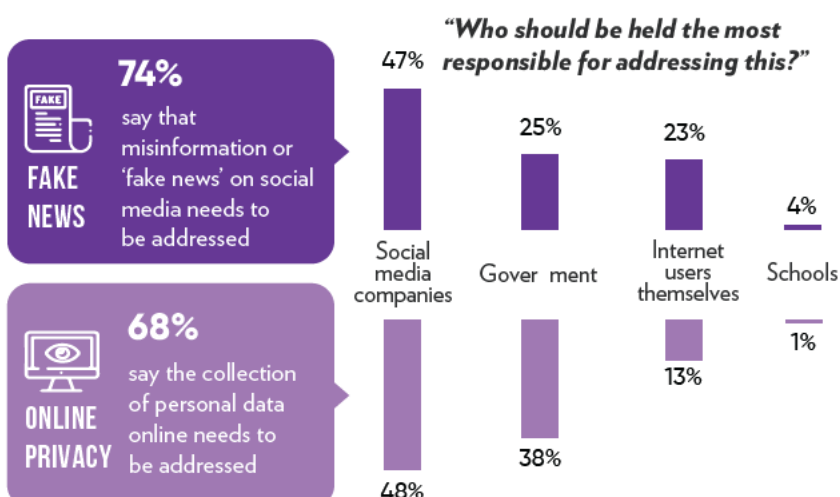
ONLY...



LEVEL OF MEDIA LITERACY



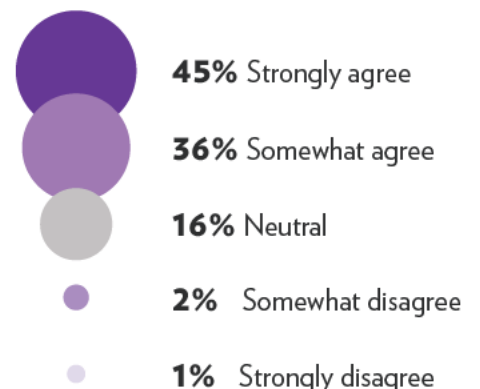
MEDIA ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED



TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS?



"Do you agree or disagree that children should receive media literacy education at school?"



The media literacy survey we present in this report is the first nationally representative study to investigate the media literacy needs, attitudes and experiences of adult Australians.

WHY WE UNDERTOOK THIS RESEARCH

The ways that we work, learn and play have been transformed by mobile and networked media technologies and associated business models over a period of two decades.

This survey and report were motivated by our recognition that these changes mean that media literacy — the ability to critically engage with media and media technologies in all aspects of life — is essential for full participation in society.

The foundations for adult media literacy begin with compulsory schooling in primary and high school. While the current Australian Curriculum includes capacity for media literacy teaching for all students, research highlights that the quality and delivery of media literacy education is not consistent^[1].

Furthermore, unlike in many other advanced democracies, adult media literacy education has not been supported in Australia in a significant or sustained way by governments. Where federal government support programs are being provided, the core focus is often on mitigating online abuses and scams, or on developing a defined set of technology skills. This is in contrast to broader initiatives that could be designed to help all Australians become effective and critical users of media and media technologies — able to draw on them when they need to, in a range of ways and contexts — to ensure they can fully participate in society^[2].

This means that for the most part, Australian citizens have been left to develop media literacy abilities on their own, an issue highlighted by the survey findings.

However, current anxieties about the impact of mis- and disinformation^[3] on Australian society appear to be increasing policy interest in adult media literacy. In December 2019, the Senate established the *Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media* to inquire into and report on the use of social media for purposes that undermine Australia's democracy and values, including the spread of mis- and disinformation.^[4] The final report is due for release in May 2022 and we expect it will address the issue of media literacy as one important response to this issue.

The 2021 Senate Inquiry report into *Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy* recommends that the Australian Government 'works with the Australian Media [Literacy] Alliance, through a co-design process, to develop a national strategy to tackle fake news and misinformation.'^[5]

Prior to this inquiry, in 2017, the then Treasurer, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, directed the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to conduct an inquiry to consider how digital platforms impact media content creators, advertisers and consumers. The ACCC's Digital Platforms Inquiry Final Report (2019) recommends that 'a Government program be established to fund and certify non-government organisations for the delivery of digital media literacy resources and training' and that 'the Terms of Reference for the review of the Australian Curriculum scheduled for 2020 should include consideration of the approach to digital media literacy education in Australian schools'.^[6]

To respond to a number of the recommendations of ACCC Digital Platforms Inquiry, in 2019 the federal government asked the major digital platforms to develop a voluntary code (or codes) of conduct to address disinformation and news quality, and they appointed the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to oversee this process. In 2020 ACMA released a position paper to guide the development of the code. The position paper argues that digital platforms should "empower users to identify the quality of news and information" by adopting measures that include supporting media literacy campaigns and educational programs.^[7]

While these developments signal a potential for progress in supporting lifelong media literacy for all Australians, no concrete changes have yet been made and no national Australian media literacy programs for adults have been launched. At the same time, it remains unclear what form adult media literacy education should take if it is to address both policy goals and a range of social needs, including the complex issue of mis- and disinformation.

We designed this media literacy survey after consulting with dozens of researchers and practitioners to understand the

knowledge gaps they felt we should address^[8]. The survey asks about the kind of media and media technologies people use and value, and whether and where they have access to support when they need it. It also asks about their experience with harmful or exploitative content and their perspectives on how best to address these issues. In addition, the survey examines how media use interacts with civic engagement and how attitudes to technology relate to media use and ability.

The survey findings illustrate that Australians recognise the need to have a range of abilities for engaging with media, and while they value those abilities, they are too often left without any learning support when they need it. The findings also highlight the diverse opportunities for media literacy education interventions to connect with the learning priorities and interests of Australians.

In addition, the survey provides some insights into the views of Australians when it comes to regulating media to address some of the major issues of our time: the misuse of personal data, the issue of mis- and disinformation, and dealing with offensive media content. We asked questions about these issues because we believe that media literacy should support citizens to be actively involved in public debates about how to address problems that relate to media technologies and media use.

Given how little is known about the media literacy needs, experiences, and priorities of adult Australians, we hope that this report can play a role in informing media literacy policies and interventions at this defining time for policy and practice.

We believe that lifelong media literacy strategies and policies in Australia are long overdue. Given all that is at stake — increasing levels of social, cultural and economic exclusion for individuals and groups, along with the potential for broader social divisions and threats to our democracy and society that come about because of mis- and disinformation — the responsibility for creating and maintaining a media literate society cannot be borne solely by individuals who are left to work things out by themselves.

^[1] Notley, T., Dezuanni, M., Zhong, H.F. & Chambers, S. 2020, *News and Australian Children in 2020: How young people access, perceive and are affected by news media*, Research Report, Sydney, Western Sydney University and Queensland University of Technology.

Dezuanni, M., Notley, T. & Corser, K. 2020, *News and Australian Teachers: How news media literacy is taught in the classroom*. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology and Western Sydney University.

^[2] For example the federal government has funded the Online Safety Grants Program and Be Connected program for seniors which is administered through the Office of the eSafety Commissioner <https://www.esafety.gov.au/>.

^[3] In this article misinformation is used to refer to information that is false or incorrect because of errors made by the author/s, while disinformation is used to refer to information that is false or incorrect and was created to mislead people. Since it is often impossible to recognise the intent of those who create or share misinformation, we use the two terms together in this report.

^[4] See https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Interference_through_Social_Media

^[5] See https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/024372/toc_pdf/Nationhood,nationalidentityanddemocracy.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf

^[6] See <https://www.accc.gov.au/publications/digital-platforms-inquiry-final-report>

^[7] See <https://www.acma.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/Misinformation%20and%20news%20quality%20position%20paper.pdf>

^[8] Please see the Acknowledgments section of this report for a list of the people and organisations we consulted with on the survey design.

DEFINING MEDIA LITERACY

This report and the research informing it uses a media literacy framework that was informed by research and has been adopted by the Australian Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA). This framework defines media literacy as 'the ability to critically engage with media in all aspects of life. It is a form of lifelong literacy that is essential for full participation in society'.

The AMLA media literacy framework outlines ten competencies and six key concepts as fundamental aspects of media literacy (see **figure A**). These competencies and key concepts have informed the design of our survey.

It is difficult to estimate a definitive and conclusive measure of people's individual media literacy through online surveys. However, survey questions can be used to generate data on particular aspects of media literacy. This survey was designed to collect data about the following aspects of media literacy.

Media use. We asked the respondents if they use a range of both digital and traditional media and we asked how frequently they use them. We used people's responses to these questions to develop different profiles of media users and to categorise people as having a low, medium or high overall level of media use.

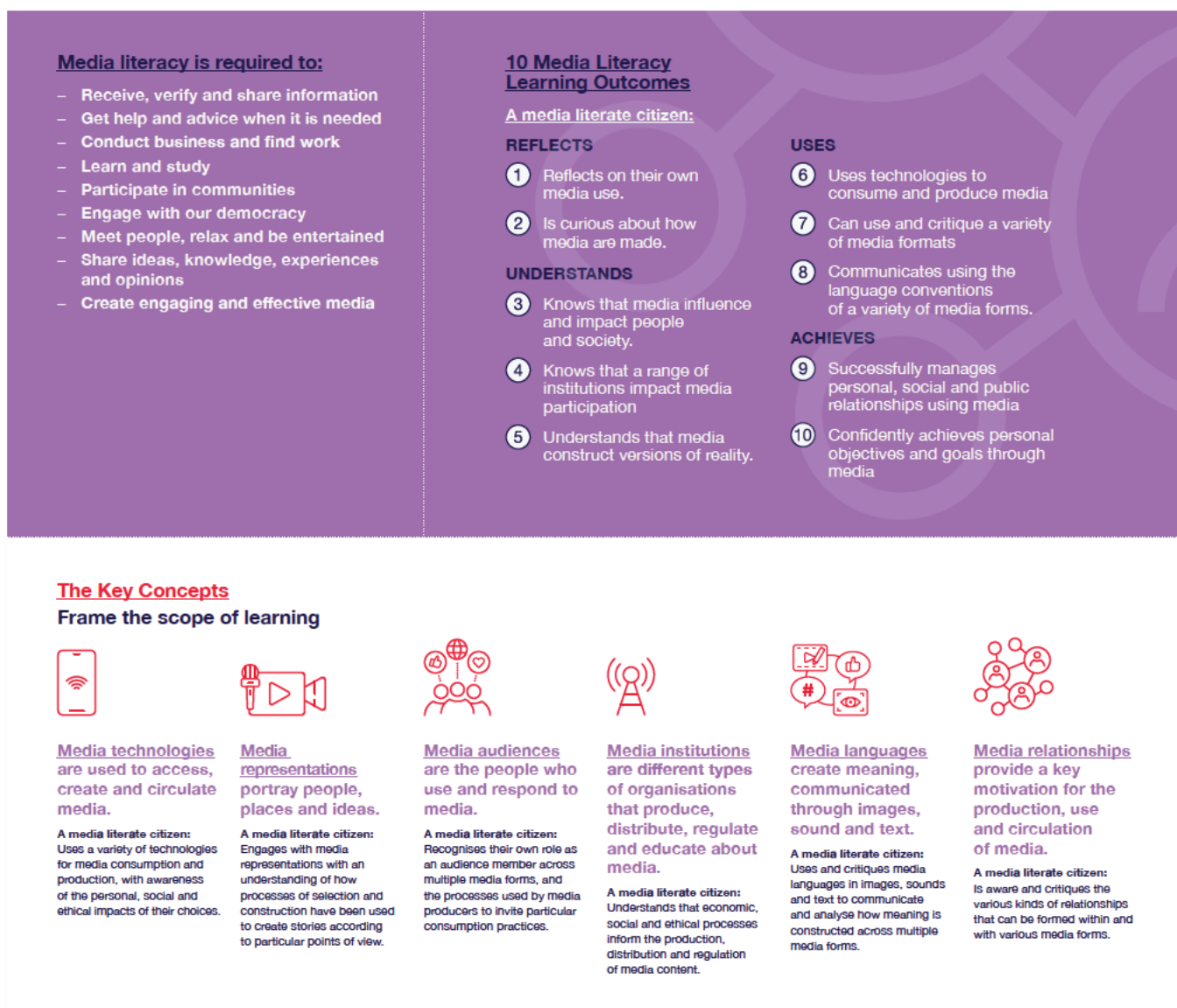
Attitudes towards media activities. Our survey draws on the AMLA media literacy framework to identify a set of 14 ways people can use media to support a range of social, economic and cultural activities ranging from 'using media to stay connected with family and friends' to 'knowing how to recognise and prevent the flow of misinformation'. We asked the respondents to tell us how important each of these 14 uses of media is in their lives. We also asked people about their attitude toward using new media technologies and platforms. In this report, we use these questions to understand whether and how people value the role of media in their lives and to consider how their attitudes relate to their media consumption, media abilities and demographic profile. These questions were also used to create a proxy indicator for how much respondents value media literacy, because they measure attitudes to media that broadly reflect the aims and outcomes of media literacy programs.

Negative media experiences. We asked the respondents about their experience of having encountered offensive material on social media and on television. Follow-up questions then identified the different actions respondents had taken as a result of seeing offensive content. We used these questions to understand whether people are able to make decisions about how to deal with offensive content when they encounter it.

Addressing the negative aspects of media. We included questions to measure where participants place the locus of responsibility for addressing prominent issues related to media and media technologies. Participants were presented with three different issues — fake news in social media, racially insensitive content on television and the collection of personal information by media organisations. They were first asked whether they considered each of these to be an issue that needed to be addressed. For those that did believe the issue needed to be addressed, a follow-up question asked users to rank four entities (i.e. the government, social media companies, schools, individuals) in terms of which was most to least responsible for addressing the issue.

Media abilities. We asked the respondents if they were able to help a friend to perform a set of 12 media activities, such as 'change their privacy settings on social media' and 'edit a video and share it online'. This set of questions was used to help us identify people's media abilities, based on their level of confidence in their ability to

► **Figure A**
Media literacy framework



Source: <https://medialiteracy.org.au/index.php/framework/>

teach an activity to someone else. This technique is often used in technology surveys as it helps minimise the social desirability bias which can result from asking respondents to self-report their own ability level. Our analysis of the media abilities of Australians can be used to inform media literacy programs by identifying areas of weakness and strength.

Civic engagement. We asked the participants whether they engage in seven common civic engagement activities, ranging from following what is happening in politics to attending public rallies or meetings. We asked these questions so we could assess whether media engagement and media literacy are associated with a person's level of civic engagement.

Entertainment media. The survey included four questions designed to elicit the extent to which respondents engage with entertainment media in a critical and reflective manner. We asked these questions to counterbalance the typical emphasis on news and information media found in media literacy policy and research, and to support a richer understanding of the role entertainment media plays in people's lives.

In many cases we have cross tabulated the findings from individual questions to provide richer insights about people's media use, needs, experiences and literacy.

KEY FINDINGS

Most Australian have a low level of confidence in their own media abilities

Most Australians have a low level of confidence in their own media abilities with less than half feeling confident in 10 out of the 12 media abilities we listed. People feel more confident in using media for information activities than for creative activities or activities requiring critical thinking. Many people lack the ability to safely navigate online environments with less than half (45%) saying they know how to change privacy settings on social media and only 39% feel confident they can take steps to identify misinformation. Even fewer adults (35%) know what to do when they are harassed online, and only a quarter (26%) understand how to read the terms and conditions of social media platforms to know what data the sites collect from their users. These abilities are strongly related to age, education and income, and, in part, are related to gender, cultural diversity and where people live.

Some Australians are at greater risk of having low media literacy

The survey findings show that adult Australians living in regional areas, less educated Australians, older Australians, people living with a disability, Indigenous Australians, and lower income Australians are more likely to use fewer types of media, have less interest in engaging with new technologies and have a lower level of media ability. Targeted media literacy programs for adults in the community should specifically cater to these groups, who are, for all of these reasons, more likely to have lower levels of media literacy.

Most Australians have had access to very few sources of media literacy support in their lifetime

Over people's lifetimes, the most common sources of support they draw on for assistance with media participation are online resources (45%), followed by friends (42%) and family (41%). Despite the existence of media literacy programs in Australian schools, primary and secondary schools were cited less often as sources of support than were tertiary education (25%) and libraries (23%). Almost half of adult Australians have had access to no source of support (30%) or access to only one source of support (17%) to help them to access, use, understand and create media *across their lifetime* based on the list of eight sources of support we provided. When asked to rate the top form of support they have received across their lifetime from this list, people nominated family first (25%), followed by online resources (20%). People with a low level of education are the group most likely to have had access to no source of media literacy support (44%).

Australians believe media literacy is important

In the survey we asked people to think about their own media use and to then tell us *how important 14 different media and communication activities are to them*. More than half of adult Australians believe 9 of the 14 media activities we listed are either 'very important' or 'extremely important'. Australians regard knowing how to stay safe online as the most important among the 14 different activities we named. More than four out of five (84%) people believe it is either *very important* or *extremely important* to know how to protect themselves from online scams and predators. Other uses of media that were frequently ranked as important included 'to stay connected with your friends and family' (73%), 'knowing how to think critically about the media you consume' (69%) and 'knowing how to recognise and prevent the flow of misinformation' (68%). Younger generations place more importance on recognising and preventing the flow of misinformation than older generations. Those with higher educational attainment, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people, and those who are heavy media and social media users, are more likely to say recognising and preventing misinformation is important to them.

Adults want children to receive media literacy education at school

Four out of five Australians (81%) say children should receive media literacy education in school. This significant level of support for media literacy in schools indicates that people believe formal education should play a more central role in the development of media literacy. The survey findings also show that schools are not currently fulfilling this need. Despite the existence of media literacy programs in Australian schools, only 14% of adults said they had received media literacy support in primary school, 22% received support in secondary school and 25% received support via tertiary education (25%). Even for those Australians aged under 24 years (Gen Z), schools were far from being a consistent source of media literacy support. Slightly more than half of this group (57%) reported having received media literacy support in high school, while 32% received support in primary school.

People who use multiple social media platforms are more likely to be critical and competent media users

There are clear generational trends when it comes to the types of media people use regularly. Older Australians are far more likely to be frequent users of broadcast or print media when compared with younger generations. Younger generations are more likely to be frequent users of digital media. Half of the respondents said they use 2–3 different types of media on a daily basis (49%). People's overall media use is lower among adults who live in regional areas, have low levels of education, or have a long-term disability. Social media is the media type that is most frequently used on a daily basis by adult Australians, followed by television. More than four in five adults (83%) reported using social media on a daily basis. People who use a greater number of social media platforms are more likely to be critical media consumers. After controlling for education level and age, people who use more social media platforms are more likely to believe it is important to think critically about the media they consume. Heavy social media users also have a higher level of media ability.

Entertainment media offer more than escapism or passive consumption

Entertainment media play a significant role in shaping Australians' understanding of themselves and the world around them. Almost half the respondents tend to *agree* or *strongly agree* with a set of four statements that indicate entertainment media play an important role in constructing a sense of self and increasing their own and others' knowledge about the world. Less than one fifth disagree with these statements. Most Australians agree that 'Entertainment programs help me to learn more about the world around me' (56%) while almost half (48%) agree that 'We can learn as much about the world around us from entertainment media as we can from news and documentary media' and 'The entertainment media I choose reflect who I am as a person' (47%). Given the important role entertainment media play in Australians' lives, media literacy efforts should not focus solely on news and information media.

Australians want media companies to take responsibility for addressing problems associated with media use

The majority (74%) of Australians say the spread of misinformation is an issue that needs to be addressed in Australia, and of these, 47% say social media companies are the most responsible for addressing this issue, followed by the government (25%) and social media users themselves (23%). Similarly, 68% say the collection of personal information online is an issue that needs to be addressed, and of these, 48% say the companies that collect this information are the most responsible for addressing the issue, followed by the government (38%), while only 13% say it's the users who are primarily responsible. In contrast, only 40% of Australians say racially insensitive content on television is an issue that needs to be addressed, and of these, 56% think it's the television companies' responsibility to address this, followed by the government (29%), while just 9% say audiences are primarily responsible. This suggests that citizens primarily want media and online companies to be accountable for finding solutions to the negative impacts created by their media and media platforms.

Many Australians do not take action when they encounter offensive material on television or social media

Among those who use social media, only about a quarter (26%) have *sometimes* or *often* encountered content that has offended them in the last 12 months. This figure was significantly higher for groups more likely to experience racism, with almost half (44%) of Indigenous people and a third (31%) of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people having experienced offensive material on social media. Education appears to play a role in being able to recognise content as offensive, with highly educated people more likely to have reported they had seen offensive content (31%) than those with a low level of education (20%). Fewer people encounter offensive content on television compared with social media, with less than one third of Australians (32%) saying they encountered content on television that offended them in the past 12 months. Australians are most likely to adopt passive or private ways to respond to offensive content on television or social media. About 43% of those who encountered offensive television content switched the channel, and 33% of those who encountered offensive social media content blocked the person. Very few people took a more public response by lodging a complaint to the e-Safety Commissioner (2%) or reporting the content to ACMA (2%). When experiencing offensive content on social media, almost half (42%) did nothing: 32% because they didn't want to and 10% because they didn't know what to do or how to. In the case of offensive content on television, 38% did nothing; 26% because they didn't want to and 12% because they didn't know how to respond.

People who have higher levels of media literacy engage in more civic engagement activities

We found that four out of ten Australians (39%) had not undertaken any of the seven listed civic engagement activities in the past 12-months. These civic activities included a number that require a lower level of engagement, such as talking to others about issues, as well as a number that require higher levels of engagement, such as attending a public forum. We found that the more types of media people consume on a daily basis, the more likely they are to have performed a greater number of these civic engagement activities. Heavy users of social media were almost four times more likely to have undertaken a higher number of civic engagement activities (30%) compared with people who don't use social media (8%). People who were confident about their ability to perform a larger number of media activities were also far more likely to have performed a larger number of civic engagement activities.

READING THE DATA

The following key terms and phrases should be noted when reading the data presented in this report.

Civic engagement: Respondents were asked if they had participated in each of seven different civic engagement activities in the past 12 months. Responses to these questions were used to create an overall measure of a person's level of civic engagement as **high** (participation in 3 or more activities; 25%), **low** (1 or 2 activities; 37%) or **none** (39%).

Critically reflective of entertainment media: We asked four questions about people's attitude towards entertainment media. We added the raw scores of the responses to the four statements ranging from one to five, one being 'strongly disagree' and five 'strongly agree'. The aggregate score ranges from four to 20. This aggregate score was then recoded into three quantiles to represent a **low** (38%), **medium** (36%) and **high** (26%) level of critical reflectiveness toward entertainment media.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) Australians: This category was applied to respondents who were recruited from a booster panel that specifically targeted people with linguistically diverse backgrounds, together with people who self-identified in response to the question 'Do you identify as ethnically or culturally diverse?'. As CALD groups are often underrepresented in online surveys, we used a booster sample (n=207) to achieve greater representation. Our booster sample recruited from people who regularly spoke one of the eight most common languages used in Australia after English. To support participation, the survey was offered in some of these languages (Chinese, Arabic, Vietnamese, Korean) and it was also offered as a telephone survey as well as online.

Digital, print and broadcast media use: Respondents' frequency of use across the ten different media types above was subjected to an exploratory factor analysis, which identified patterns of digital, print and broadcast media use. Aggregate frequency scores for using each of the corresponding media types were divided into three equal quantiles to represent low, medium and high uses of digital, print and broadcast media.

Disability: People living with disability were defined by first asking respondents 'Do you have a long-term health condition or impairment/disability?' Those who answered 'Yes', were then asked whether any of their

impairments limit their everyday activities. A total of 17% responded in the affirmative, and were correspondingly categorised as living with disability. This is comparable to the national figure of 18%, as measured by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Education level: Respondents were asked to select the highest level of education they had completed from nine options, ranging from not having completed any formal education through to having a postgraduate degree. This was then coded into categories of:

- » **Low** (21%): did not complete secondary school
- » **Medium** (54%): completed high school or a certificate/diploma/associate level qualification; and
- » **High** (25%): completed a bachelor degree or higher

Generation: People were grouped into generations based on their age, using categories defined by the Pew Research Center. For Generation Z we only collected data from 18–23 year-olds.

Generation	Year of birth	Age	Proportion of sample
Generation Z	1997–2002	18–23	9%
Generation Y	1981–1996	24–39	31%
Generation X	1965–1980	40–55	25%
Baby boomers	1946–1964	56–74	30%
75+	1928–1945	75–92	5%

Income: Respondents were asked to select their gross household income from six income ranges. Each range covers approximately 17% of the population, based on data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Pairs of ranges were combined to provide a simpler categorisation of **low** (under \$57,000), **medium** (\$57,000 to \$124,999) or **high** (over \$125,000) household income.

Indigenous Australians: This term is used to define people who self-identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. Indigenous Australians are typically underrepresented in online surveys. We used a booster sample (n=200) to minimise the effect of this misrepresentation. The survey was also offered online and via telephone. However, we acknowledge this booster sample is not necessarily representative of Indigenous Australians. When compared to

the national average for Indigenous people, our booster sample had a higher proportion of people with a high level of education and a higher level of household income and a higher proportion of people who live in a metropolitan area.

Interest in new technologies: Respondents were asked about their level of interest in and adoption of new technologies, and were grouped into categories of **high** ('like' or 'love' new technologies and 'use them before most people I know'; 21%), **medium** ('usually use new technologies when most people I know do'; 42%) and **low** ('sceptical of new technologies' or 'usually one of the last people I know to use new technologies'; 37%).

Media ability: We estimated the overall level of media ability by aggregating the confidence level (1 to 5) of respondents across each of the 12 items, giving a score ranging from 12 to 60. We grouped respondents into **low** (35%), **medium** (34%) and **high** (30%).

Overall media use: This measure reflects both diversity and frequency of media use. It is calculated using the frequency with which people reported using ten different types of media: newspapers (print), magazines (print), radio (AM/FM), television channels (free-to-air, pay television), cinema, news websites or news apps, radio (using a mobile app or smart speaker), video games, video streaming services (e.g. Netflix, iView), podcasts and social media. Aggregate scores were divided into three quantiles representing **low** (34%), **medium** (32%) and **high** (33%) levels of overall media use.

Region: the postcode of each respondent was classified as falling into either a **metropolitan** (50.2%), **major regional** (27.2%) or **regional** (22.6%) area based on the most recent classification published by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

Social media use: Respondents were asked how often they had used each of 16 social media platforms in the past week. Responses were coded into categories of **heavy users** (6 or more times per day), **moderate users** (1–5 times a day), **light users** (1–6 days a week) and **non-users**.



FINDINGS IN DETAIL

01

MEDIA CONSUMPTION

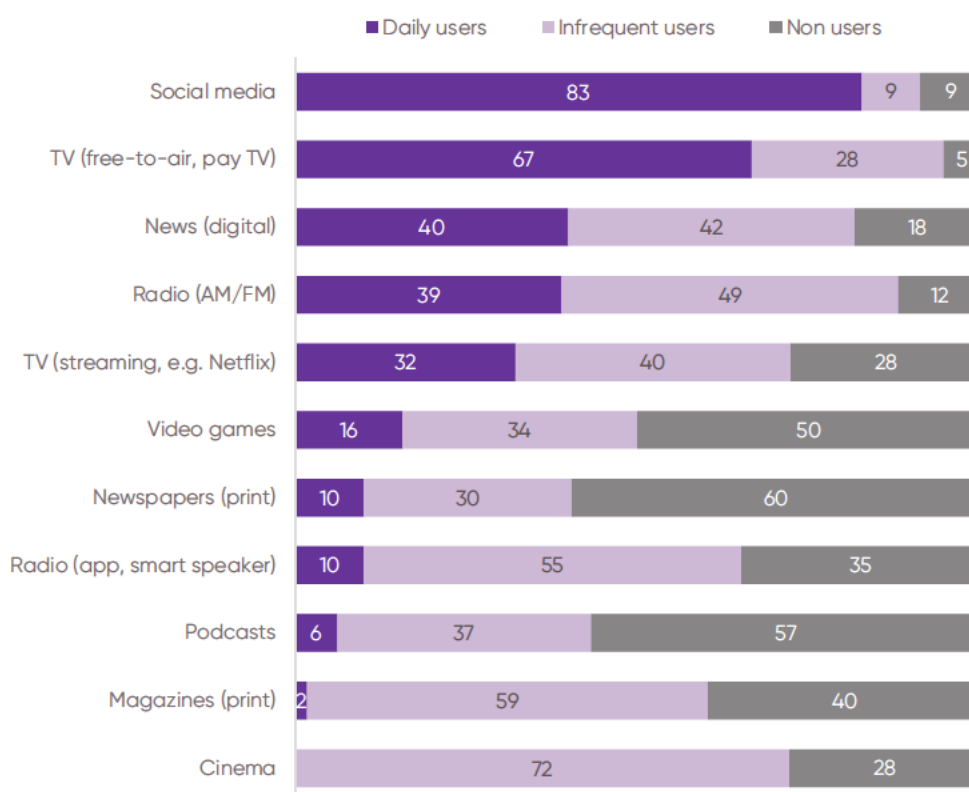
- » Most adult Australians use 2–3 different types of media on a daily basis.
 - » Overall media use is lower among adults who live in regional areas, have low levels of education, or are living with a disability.
 - » Almost half of all adult Australians (49%) reported using more than three different social media platforms in the past week.
 - » Social media dominates the daily media use practices of Australian adults.
 - » Education and age are strong predictors of engagement with social media.
-

SOCIAL MEDIA DOMINATES DAILY MEDIA USE

When it comes to daily media use, social media strongly dominates the everyday media use practices of Australians, with more than four in five adults (83%) using social media on a daily basis (see **figure 1.1**). While we did not look at the time people spend on media, we found that social media outperforms television when it comes to daily media use — not only when we look individually at traditional television broadcast (67%) and streaming television (32%), but also when we consider people's overall

use of television across either of these formats (77%). By contrast, less than half of all adult Australians report using radio daily (42%) — whether by AM/FM radio, mobile app or smart speaker. Three of the media types we asked respondents about are notable for a high proportion of non-users: more than half of adult Australians say that they *never* listen to streaming radio using an app or smart speaker (60%) or to podcasts (57%), and half never use video games (50%).

► **Figure 1.1**
*Frequency of media usage,
by media type (%)*



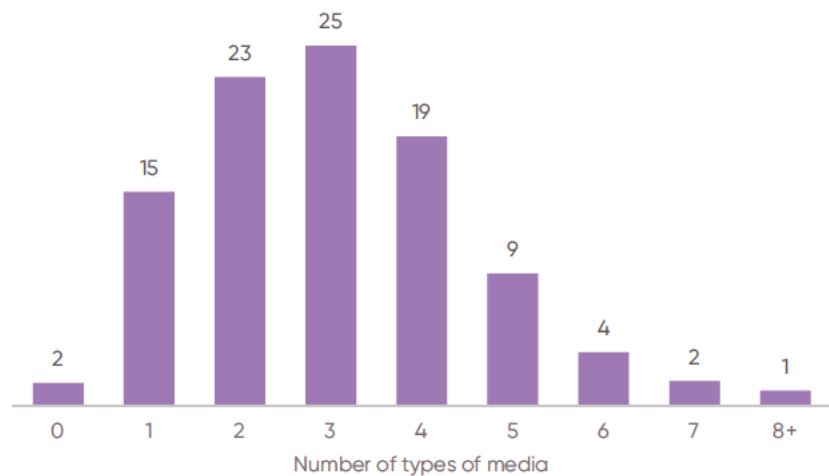
AU.1 In the past 12 months, how often did you typically use the following media?

DAILY MEDIA PRACTICES

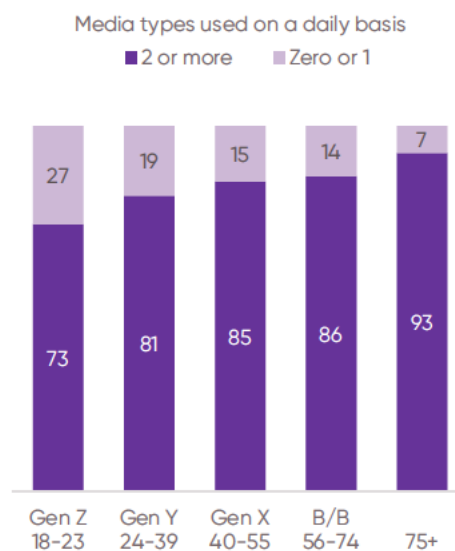
The daily media practices of adult Australians most commonly involve the use of either two (23%) or three (25%) different types of media (see **figure 1.2**). Only a small percentage of adults do not use any type of media on a daily basis (2%), while 15% only use one type of media on a daily basis. Almost one in six adults (16%) reported using five or more different types of media each day. Surprisingly, one in four (27%) Gen

Z respondents (ages 18–23) said they only use one media type each day — higher than any other age group (social media was the media type used daily by this group). Australians aged 75 or older were the group least likely to use only one type of media on a daily basis (7%). Gen X and Y are most likely to use four or more types of media each day (see **figure 1.3**).

► **Figure 1.2**
Number of different media
types used on a daily basis (%)



► **Figure 1.3**
Number of different media
types used on a daily basis,
by age (%)

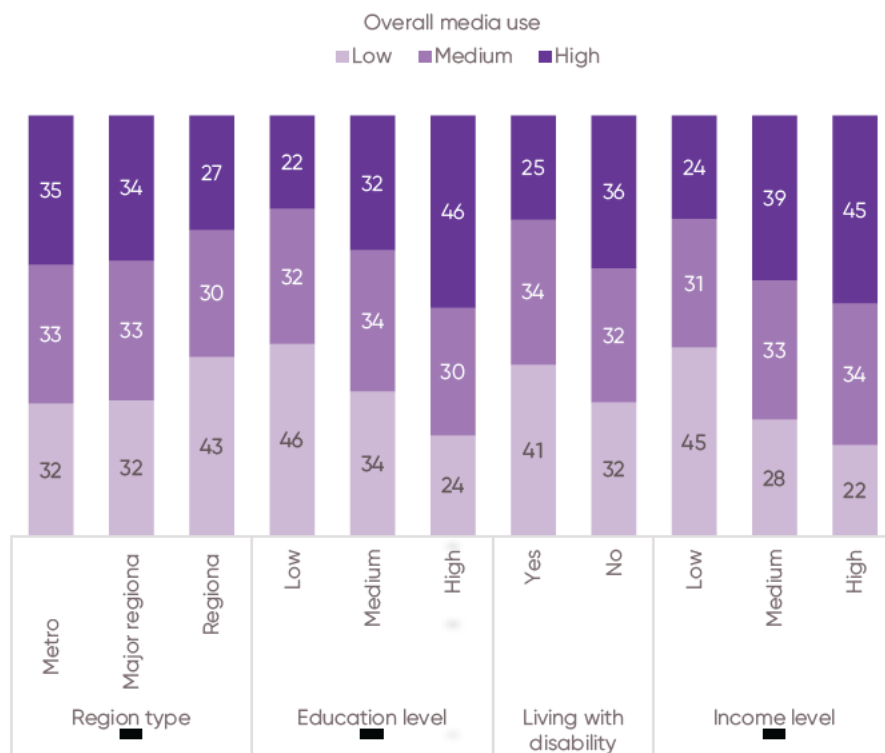


DISADVANTAGED GROUPS CONSUME LESS MEDIA

People who live in regional areas, or have low levels of education, or who are living with a disability are all more likely to consume media less frequently. Education is the greatest predictor of media use, with highly-educated people almost twice as likely to be placed in the high user group (46%) when compared with those with a low level of education (24%). While more than one third of adult Australians living in metropolitan areas (35%) are 'high' media consumers, just 27% of their regional counterparts fall into this category.

Similar trends are shown for people living with a disability. More than one third of adults who do not have a disability (35%) are 'high' media consumers, but this figure drops to 24% for adults living with a disability.

► **Figure 1.4**
Overall media use,
by demographics (%)

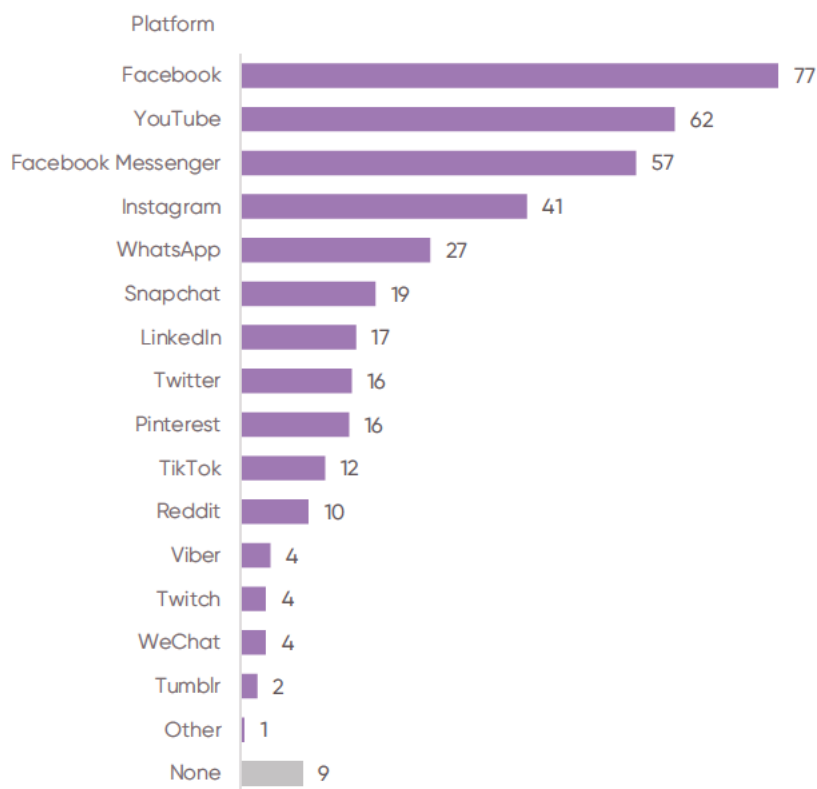


DOMINANT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Facebook is the most commonly accessed social media platform among adult Australians (77%), followed by YouTube (62%) and Instagram (41%) (see **figure 1.5**). Despite the attention frequently given to Twitter in the Australian news media, fewer than one in six (16%) adult Australians used that platform in the past week — putting it behind a number of other platforms, including Snapchat (19%) and LinkedIn (17%).

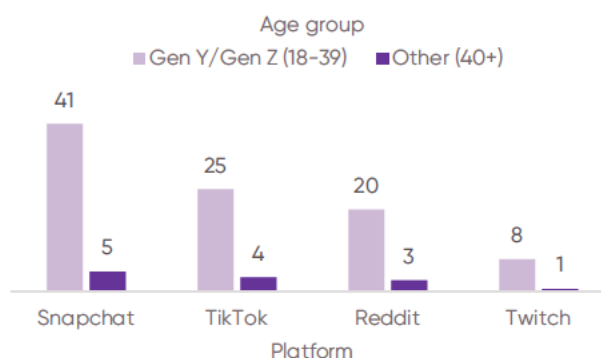
While younger adults are generally more likely to use social media, certain platforms are overwhelmingly used by younger audiences. Gen Y and Gen Z are around seven times more likely to have used Snapchat, TikTok, Reddit and Twitch in the past week when compared with older generations (see **figure 1.6**).

► **Figure 1.5**
Usage of
social media
platforms in
the past week
(%)



AU.4 Which social media sites did you use in the past week?

► **Figure 1.6**
Usage of selected social
media platforms,
by age group (%)



SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND MEDIA LITERACY

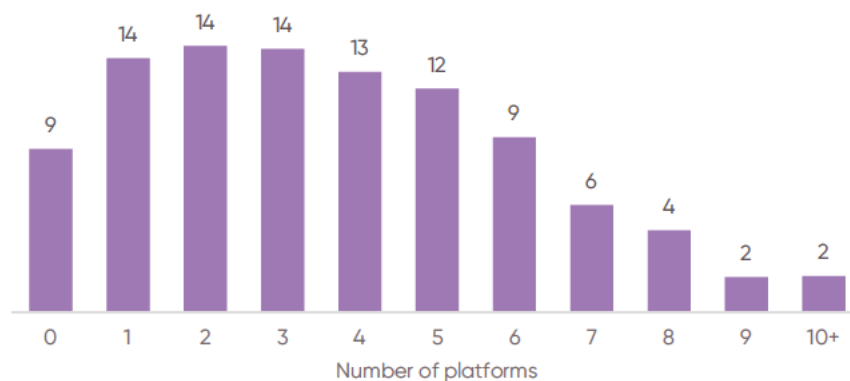
Half of all adult Australians (49%) used four or more different social media platforms in the past week (see **figure 1.7**). People who use more social media platforms are more likely to be critical

media consumers. That is, they are more likely to believe it is important to think critically about the media they consume (see **figure 1.8**). They also have higher levels of media literacy

when measured by their confidence to perform a range of media tasks (see **figure 1.9**).

► **Figure 1.7**

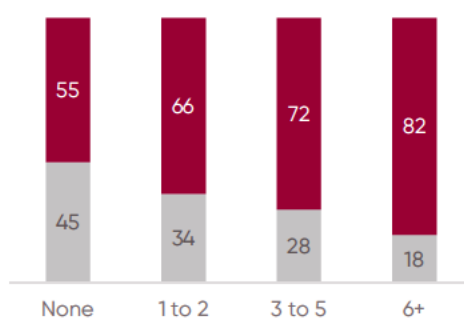
Number of different social media platforms used in the past week (%)



► **Figure 1.8**

Attitude to thinking critically about media consumption, by number of social media platforms used in the past week (%)

Attitude to thinking critically about media consumption
■ Not important ■ Important



Number of social media platforms used in the last week

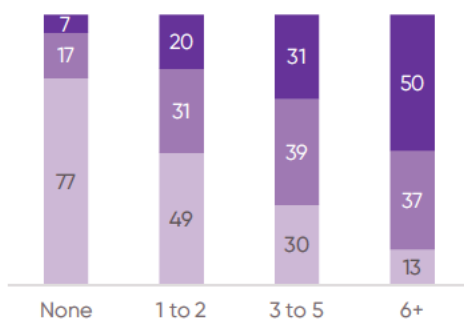
A.1 Thinking about your media use, how important is the following to you?

'To know how to think critically about the media you consume'. Response options coded to 'important' (which includes 'very important' and 'extremely important') and 'not important' (which includes 'not at all important', 'not very important', or 'neither important nor unimportant'). The 'not sure' response was excluded. [N= 3,402]

► **Figure 1.9**

Overall level of media ability, by number of social media platforms used in the past week (%)

Level of media ability
■ Low ■ Medium ■ High



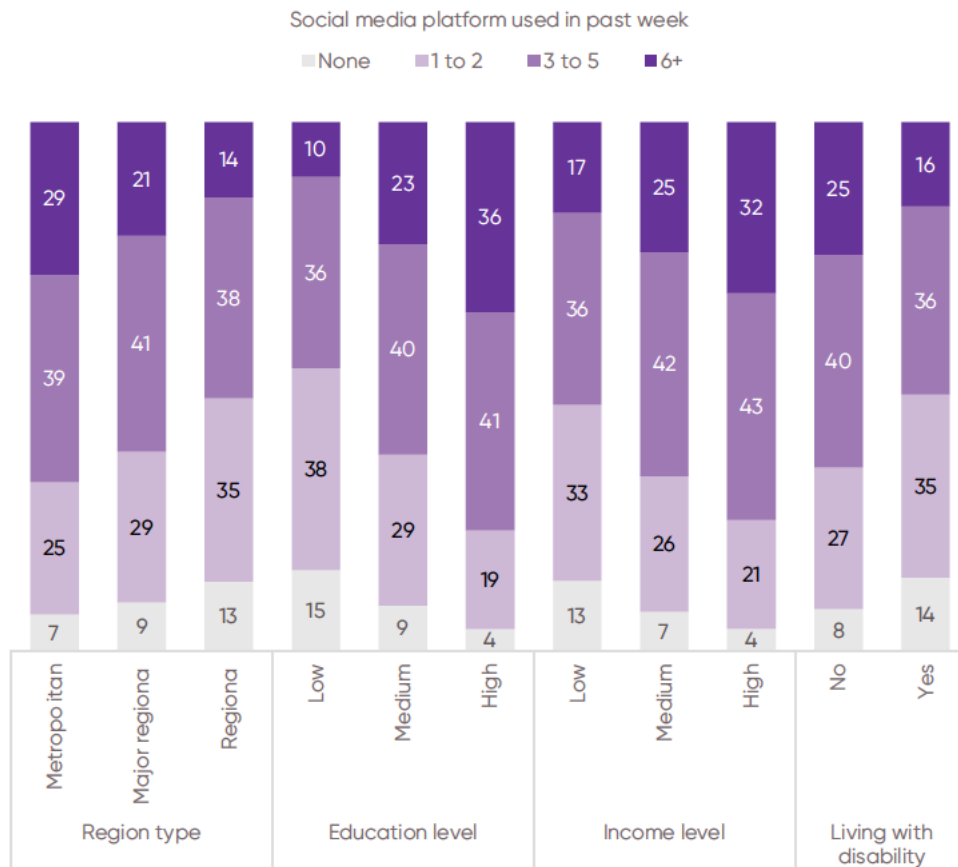
Number of social media platforms used in the last week

DISADVANTAGED GROUPS ENGAGE LESS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

People who live in regional areas of Australia, have low levels of education or income, or are living with a disability are all more likely to engage with social media via a narrower range of platforms. More than three quarters

(77%) of adults with a high level of education used three or more different social media platforms in the past week, compared with just 46% of those with a low level of education.

► **Figure 1.10**
Number of social media
platforms used in the past week,
by demographics (%)



KEY FINDINGS

Most Australians report using either two (23%) or three (25%) different media types on a daily basis. Surprisingly, Gen Z (18–23 years), were the generation most likely to use only one or no types of media on a daily basis, while Millennials and Gen X (24–55 years) were the most likely to use four or more types of media on a daily basis. There were only two types of media that more than half of all adult Australians report using daily: broadcast television (67%) and social media (83%). Four in ten adults also reported using digital forms of news media daily (40%) and AM/FM radio (39%).

Given the diversity and range of media use these findings highlight, it is important that media literacy education is not narrowly focused on one particular type of medium or on digital media forms alone. It is also clear that television and social media are, by far, the types of media most frequently used and they are therefore worthy of significant attention when it comes to adult media literacy resources and support.

When we classified people in terms of how frequently they use media we found that age, disability, education and income all had statistically significant relationships to these categories. Older Australians, adults with a disability, adults with less education or those living in a low-income household were all less likely to be classified in the highest category of media use.

Just under half of all adult Australians (49%) used four or more different social media platforms in the week before the survey. People who use more social media platforms were found to believe it is important to think critically about the media they consume. They also have higher levels of media literacy when measured by their confidence in their ability to perform a range of 12 media tasks. People who live in regional areas of Australia, have low levels of education or income, or are living with a disability are all more likely to only engage with social media via a narrower range of platforms. In this way, the research suggests that a range of socio-economic and geographic variables impact the types of media people use and the frequency with which they use them.

We also found stark differences between younger and older adults when it comes to preferred social media platforms. Overall, across age groups, Facebook, Youtube and Instagram are by far the most popular platforms among people who regularly engage on social media, suggesting media literacy efforts should be focussed on these platforms. However, younger audiences are far more likely to make regular use of Snapchat, TikTok and Reddit — platforms that are all used in different ways and therefore introduce different media literacy issues and needs. This suggests that media literacy that is focused on safe, effective and critical social media engagement must be informed by the varied technologies and practices that dominate different social media platforms, and avoid being narrowly focused on just a few dominant platforms.

02

MEDIA CONSUMPTION PROFILES

- » Patterns of media consumption are strongly influenced by people's age, with younger generations more likely to be high consumers of digital media and older generations more likely to be high consumers of print and broadcast media.
 - » Higher rates of digital media consumption are more likely to be found among people who live in metropolitan areas and/or have a high level of education.
 - » CALD Australians were found to have higher levels of digital consumption.
-

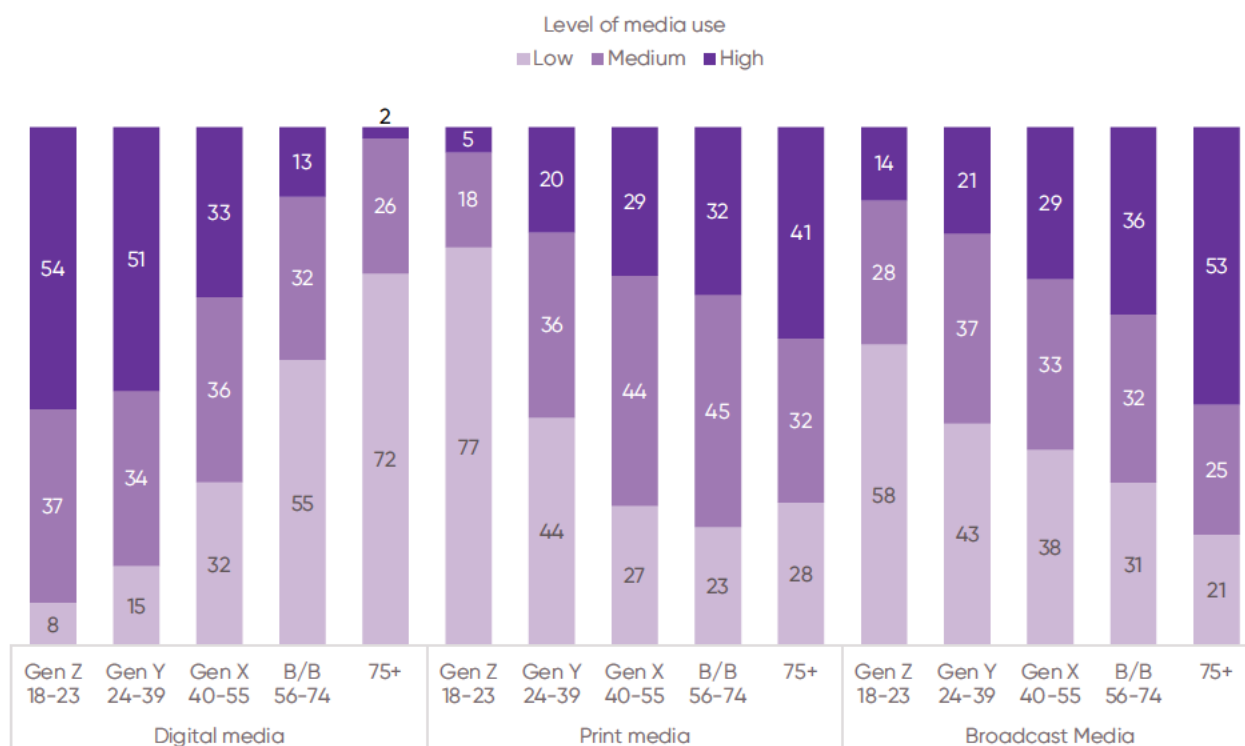
AGE IS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE TYPES OF MEDIA PEOPLE USE

We identified patterns of media consumption from our survey data by looking at people's level of *digital consumption* (their use of digital media); *print consumption* (their use of print newspapers and magazines); and *broadcast consumption* (their use of AM/FM radio and broadcast television). We find that patterns of media use are strongly influenced by

people's age (see **Figure 2.1**). This influence is most pronounced when it comes to digital media use, with more than half (54%) of Gen Z (18–23 years) falling into the highest category of digital media use compared to less than 2% of people aged 75 or older. This trend is reversed for broadcast media (television and radio), with more than half of all older Australians being high

users of broadcast media (53% of those aged 75 or older) compared to 1 in 7 (14%) of Gen Z. Patterns of print media usage show a similar increase with age, with those aged 75 or older much more likely to be frequent consumers of print media (41%).

► **Figure 2.1**
Level of media use (digital, print, broadcast)¹, by generation (%)



AU.1 In the past 12 months, how often did you typically use the following media?

AU.4B How often did you use these social media sites in the past week?

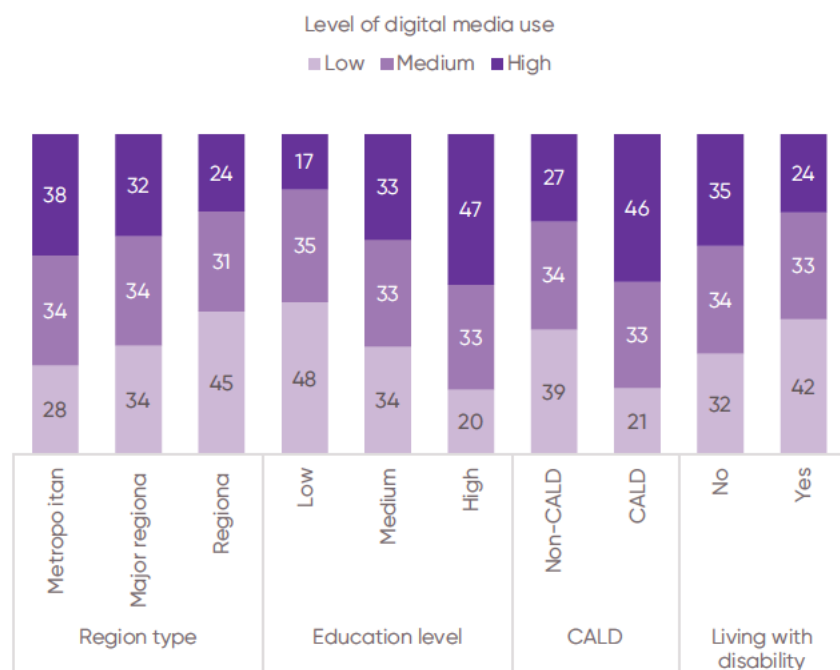
¹ Levels of media consumption are based on aggregate frequency responses for digital (news websites and apps; radio using a smart speaker or app; video games; video streaming services; podcasts; social media), print (newspapers; magazines) and broadcast (AM/FM radio; television channels) media types. Categories of 'high', 'medium' and 'low' were assigned by splitting aggregate responses into broadly equal quantiles.

GAPS IN USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

While differences in print and broadcast media use are largely limited to age, levels of digital media use vary depending on where people live, their level of education, and whether or not they are people who are CALD (see **figure 2.2**). People living in regional Australia are much less likely to be high consumers of digital media than their metropolitan counterparts. Just one in four (24%) regional Australians fall into the high category of users, compared to 38% of people living in a metropolitan

area. This gap in digital media use is even greater when analysed from the perspective of people's level of education. Almost half of all Australians with a high level of education (47%) are high users of digital media, whereas under one in five (17%) people with a low level of education fall into this category. There is also a trend whereby CALD Australians and people not living with a disability tend to be higher overall users of digital media.

► **Figure 2.2**
Level of digital media use, by demographics (%)



KEY FINDINGS

There are clear generational trends when it comes to the types of media people use. Older Australians are far more likely to be frequent users of broadcast or print media when compared with young generations. Younger generations are far more likely to be frequent users of digital media.

Other variables are also associated with people's media use. People living in regional Australia are much less likely to be high consumers of digital media than their metropolitan counterparts, as are people who are living with a disability. These patterns of media use have important implications for media literacy — if media literacy initiatives are to be focused on supporting critical and capable media engagement, and are to do so effectively, then they must connect with people's everyday media practices. These media use consumption patterns can therefore be used to inform targeted and appropriate media literacy initiatives that are relevant to different socio-economic and other groups in Australia.

03

FAMILIARITY WITH THE TERM 'MEDIA LITERACY'

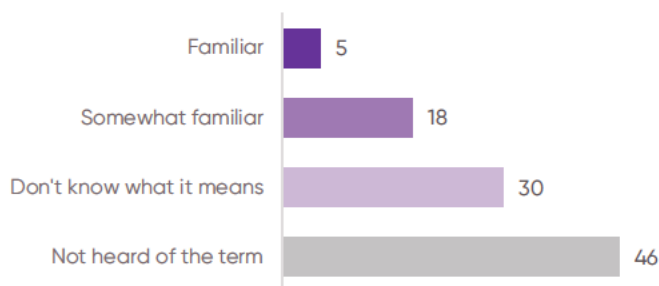
-
- » More than three quarters (77%) of adult Australians are unfamiliar with the term 'media literacy'.
 - » Adults who are familiar with 'media literacy' are also much more likely to be highly media literate.
 - » Adults who consume more media are more likely to be familiar with the term.
 - » Younger adults, who have more exposure to media literacy education, are only slightly more familiar with the term.
 - » Adults with low education levels, low household income, and women are all less likely to be familiar with media literacy.
-

OVERALL FAMILIARITY WITH MEDIA LITERACY IS LOW

More than three out of four adult Australians (77%) have either never heard of the term 'media literacy' or they don't know what it means (see **figure 3.1**). Less than one in five (18%) people reported being 'somewhat

familiar' with the term 'media literacy', while only a small proportion (5%) reporting that they are confident they know what this term means.

► **Figure 3.1**
Familiarity with the term
'media literacy' (%)



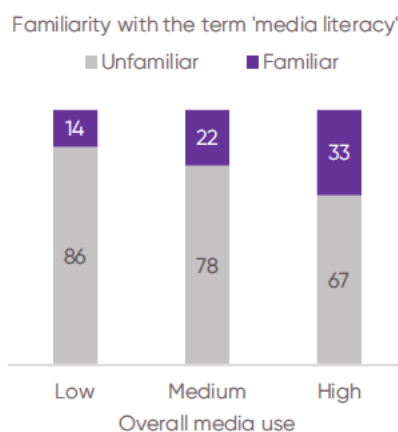
F.1 How familiar are you with the term "media literacy"?

MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND MEDIA LITERACY

The more media people consume, the more likely they are to be familiar with the term 'media literacy' (see **figure 3.2**). People's level of media consumption was assessed by looking at how often they use a range of

different media. One third (33%) of adults in the highest category of overall media use are familiar with the term, compared to just 14% of people who are the lowest consumers of media.

► **Figure 3.2**
Familiarity with the term
'media literacy',
by overall media use (%)



Has familiarity = familiar/somewhat familiar;

Unfamiliar = not heard of the term/doesn't know what it means

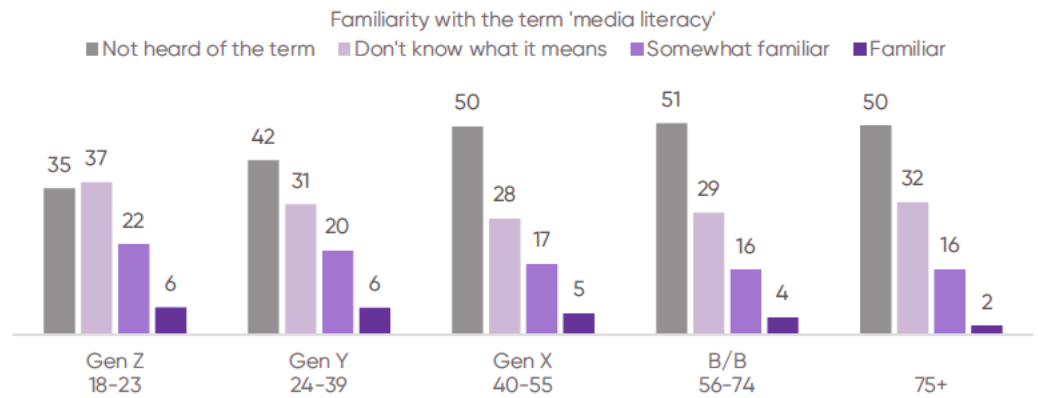
YOUNGER ADULTS ARE ONLY MODERATELY MORE FAMILIAR WITH THE TERM 'MEDIA LITERACY'

While younger adults are more familiar with the term 'media literacy' (see **figure 3.3**), the gap between generations is not as large as might be

expected. Slightly more than one in four (27%) Gen Z and Gen Y (18–39) adults are familiar or are somewhat familiar with the term, with this figure

dropping to under one in five (19%) for Baby Boomers (56–74) and those aged 75 or older.

► **Figure 3.3**
Familiarity with the term 'media literacy', by generation (%)



F.1 How familiar are you with the term "media literacy"?

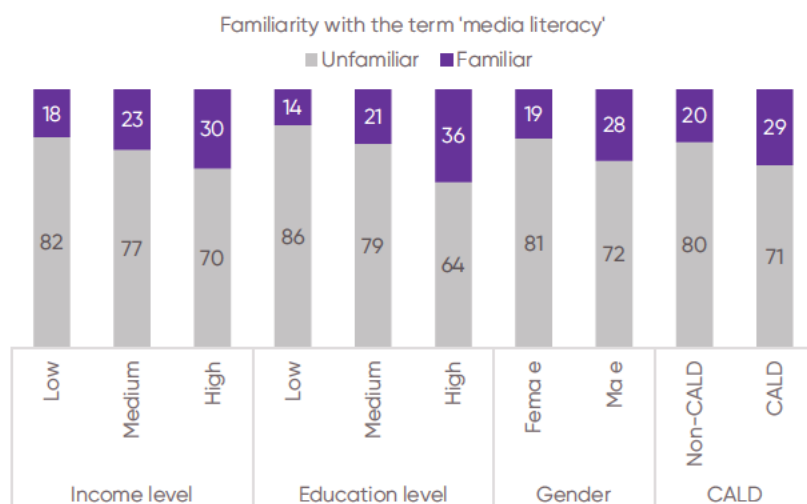
DISADVANTAGED GROUPS ARE LESS FAMILIAR WITH MEDIA LITERACY

Adults in low-income households, adults who have low levels of education, and women are all less likely to be familiar with the term 'media literacy' (see **figure 3.4**). The most

significant difference, though, emerges from differing levels of education. While more than one third (36%) of highly educated adults are familiar with the term 'media literacy', this figure

drops to just 14% for those with low levels of education.

► **Figure 3.4**
Familiarity with the term 'media literacy', by demographics (%)



KEY FINDINGS

Unlike in many other advanced democracies, public and policy discussions about media literacy in Australia are in their infancy. Therefore, in this survey we did not assume that Australians would be familiar with the term 'media literacy' or have a clear idea of what it means to be media literate.

The findings show that less than one in four adult Australians are either familiar (7%) or are somewhat familiar (18%) with this term. This suggests that significant effort is required to engage Australians in a meaningful discussion about the media literacy they, and/or their families, have or need.

The survey findings also suggest that familiarity with the term 'media literacy' is associated with having a higher level of education. Younger people are also more likely to be familiar with the term, though not as much as we would have expected, given the various initiatives that have emerged to implement media education programs in schools over the past two decades. While this finding may suggest that media literacy programs have not reached most recent school graduates, it is also possible that people received these kinds of lessons in school but the term 'media literacy' was not used. For example, depending on the state curriculum they are taught under, students are likely to be exposed to terms like 'Media', 'Media studies', 'Film, Television and New Media', or perhaps to the term Media Arts, which is used in the Australian Curriculum.

Importantly, familiarity with the term 'media literacy' is associated with higher levels of media use *and* high levels of media ability. This suggests that those who use media more often and those who have a higher level of media ability are also more likely to encounter discussions about, or opportunities for, media literacy training and support.

04

MEDIA ABILITY

- » Only a quarter of Australian adults (26%) are confident in their ability to interpret the terms of service of a social media site to know what data the site collects from its users, and even fewer people (23%) are confident in editing and sharing videos online.
 - » Australians have a moderate level of confidence in their information literacy skills, such as finding something online (56%), knowing what to share online (50%) and changing privacy settings (45%).
 - » People lack confidence in critical media skills such as choosing an age-appropriate video game.
 - » Those who consume a more diverse range of media, and do so more frequently, have more confidence in their media ability.
 - » Younger people, men and those who have higher level of education have more confidence in their own media ability.
 - » People who have a high level of media ability are three times more likely to be familiar with the concept of media literacy than those with a low level ability.
-

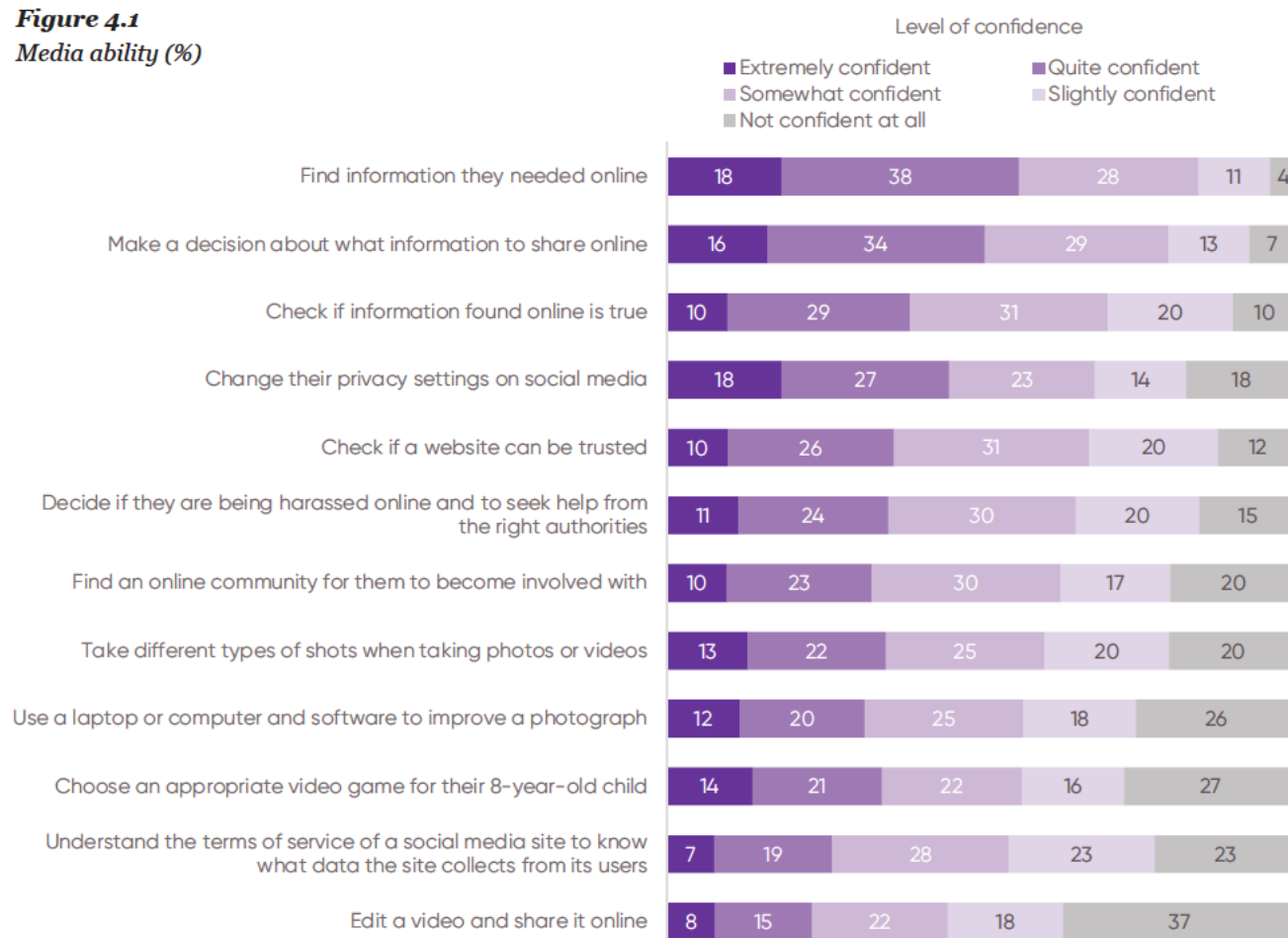
AUSTRALIANS HAVE A LOW LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE IN THEIR MEDIA ABILITIES

We asked respondents to imagine that a friend needs help with 12 tasks related to online media, and we asked them how confident they would be to provide this help. Deciding what to share online (50%) and finding information online (56%) were the

two items that at least half of the respondents felt extremely or quite confident in helping others with. Confidence levels are much lower for those media abilities that relate to media production. More than one third of Australians (37%) are not confident

at all in being able to 'edit a video and share it online' and more than one quarter (26%) have no confidence in their ability to 'use a computer to improve a photograph' (see **figure 4.1**).

► **Figure 4.1**
Media ability (%)



C.1 Imagine a friend needs your help. How confident are you to help them with these tasks?

We estimated the overall level of media ability by aggregating the confidence level (1 to 5) of respondents across each of the 12 items, giving a score ranging from 12 to 60. We grouped respondents into low (35%), medium (34%) and high (30%) levels of overall in media ability. The low ability group has a mean score of 23, medium 36 and high 48.

Overall, less than 50% of Australians feel confident about their ability to perform 10 out of the 12 media abilities we listed. The only items where more than half of Australians were confident were 'Find information they need online (e.g. health information, finding a job)' (56%) and 'Make a decision about what information to share online' (50%).

MEDIA ABILITY BY DEMOGRAPHICS

The overall media ability of Australians is strongly associated with age, education level and income level. Three quarters (75%) of people aged 75 and over have the lowest level of overall media ability. In contrast, 47% of Gen Z and 41% of Gen Y have high levels of media ability. As people's education level increases, so too does their level of confidence in their own media ability. More than half (56%) of Australian adults with a low level of education

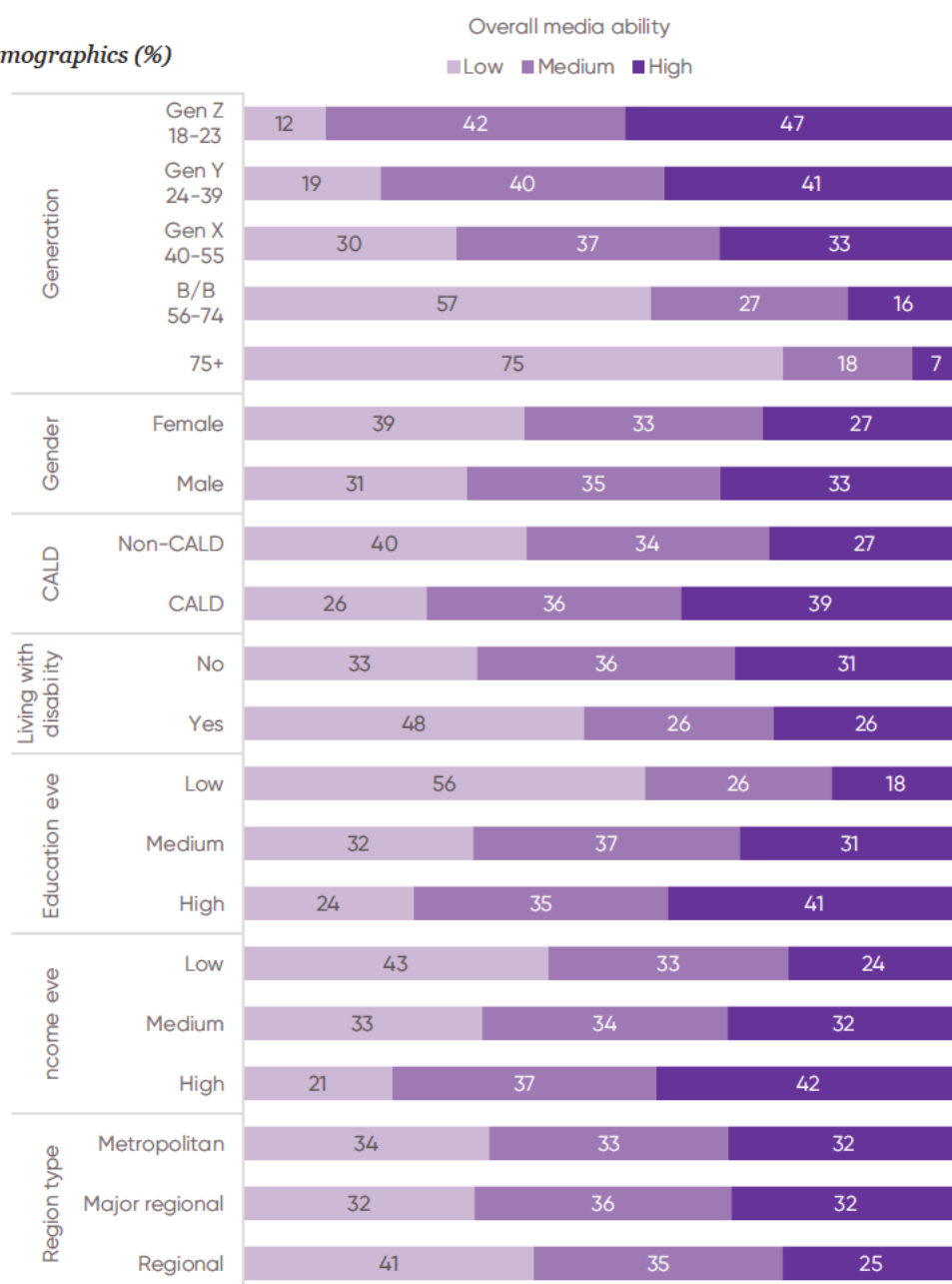
have low confidence in their media ability, which drops to one quarter (24%) for those with a high level of education.

Smaller — but nonetheless significant — associations with media ability are also related to gender, cultural and linguistic diversity and whether or not someone lives in a metropolitan area. Men are 6% more likely than women to fall into the highest category of media ability,

while Australians living in metropolitan areas are 9% more likely to do so than their regional counterparts.

People living with a disability are 15% more likely to fall into the lowest category of media ability. People on a low income are 10% more likely to fall into the lowest category of media ability (see **figure 4.2**).

► **Figure 4.2**
Media ability, by demographics (%)



MEDIA ABILITY BY MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA CONSUMPTION

People who are more frequent consumers of media are more likely to have a higher level of confidence in their ability when it comes to using and creating media (see **figure 4.3**).

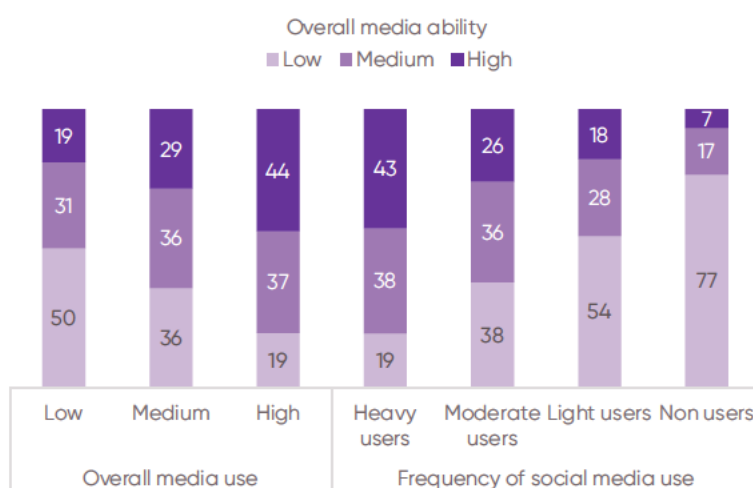
Among the highest category of media consumers — those who consume diverse types of media on a regular basis — almost half (44%) also fall into

the highest level of media ability. Just 19% of people who consume the least media are also in this highest level of media ability.

A similar trend is shown among social media use. The more frequently people use social media, the more likely they are to have stronger overall confidence in their ability to use and create online

media. Heavy users of social media (43%) are more than six times more likely than non-users (7%) to have the highest level of media ability. This association between high social media use and high media ability was observed even when controlling for other relevant factors, such as age and education level.

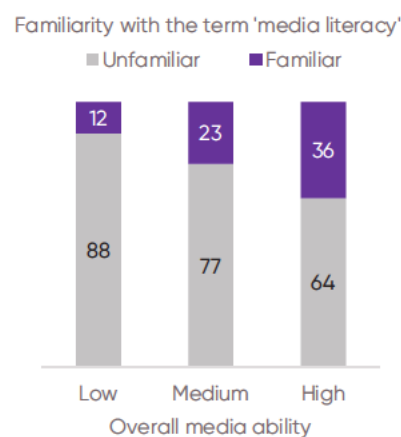
► **Figure 4.3**
Media ability, by overall and social media use (%)



FAMILIARITY WITH MEDIA LITERACY AND MEDIA ABILITY

As people's level of online media ability increases, so too does their familiarity with the concept of media literacy (see **figure 4.4**). People who fall into the highest category of online media ability are three times more likely (36%) to be familiar with the term 'media literacy' than those in the lowest category of media ability (12%).

► **Figure 4.4**
Familiarity with the term 'media literacy', by media ability (%)



KEY FINDINGS

In general, Australians have a low level of confidence in their media ability, with fewer than 50% of Australians feeling confident in 10 out of the 12 media abilities we listed. People's confidence level is overall much higher when it comes to using media for information activities than it is for creative activities.

Importantly, we also found that people are lacking the confidence to safely navigate online environments. The overall deficiency in even some of the basic media abilities identified in the survey is concerning, particularly because those who are using less media, and less often, also have lower confidence levels. Older Australians, women, people with a lower level of formal education, people living outside metropolitan areas, people living with a disability and people from low income households were all found to be less likely to have a high level of media ability. At the same time, Australians who use media less frequently and those who use no social media or are light users are all more likely to have a lower level of media ability.

Left unchecked, these disparities may exacerbate divisions between those who are able to use media and media technologies in ways that benefit them and those who cannot. This finding suggests that media literacy programs should prioritise and meet the needs of those groups that are in need and are therefore most likely to benefit from media literacy support.

05

THE MEDIA ACTIVITIES PEOPLE VALUE

- » 84% of adult Australians say the ability to stay safe online is very or extremely important in their lives.
 - » 72% say the ability to use media to stay connected to family and friends is very or extremely important.
 - » Younger generations, culturally and linguistically diverse Australians, heavy social media users and heavy media users are all more likely to believe it is important to be able to use media to connect with friends and family.
 - » More than half of all Australians believe 9 of the 14 media activities are either very or extremely important.
 - » Less than one in ten Australians (7%) think any of the 14 media activities are not important in their lives.
-

THE IMPORTANCE OF USING MEDIA IN PEOPLE'S LIVES

In the survey, we asked people to think about their own media use and to then tell us *how important 14 different media activities are to them*.

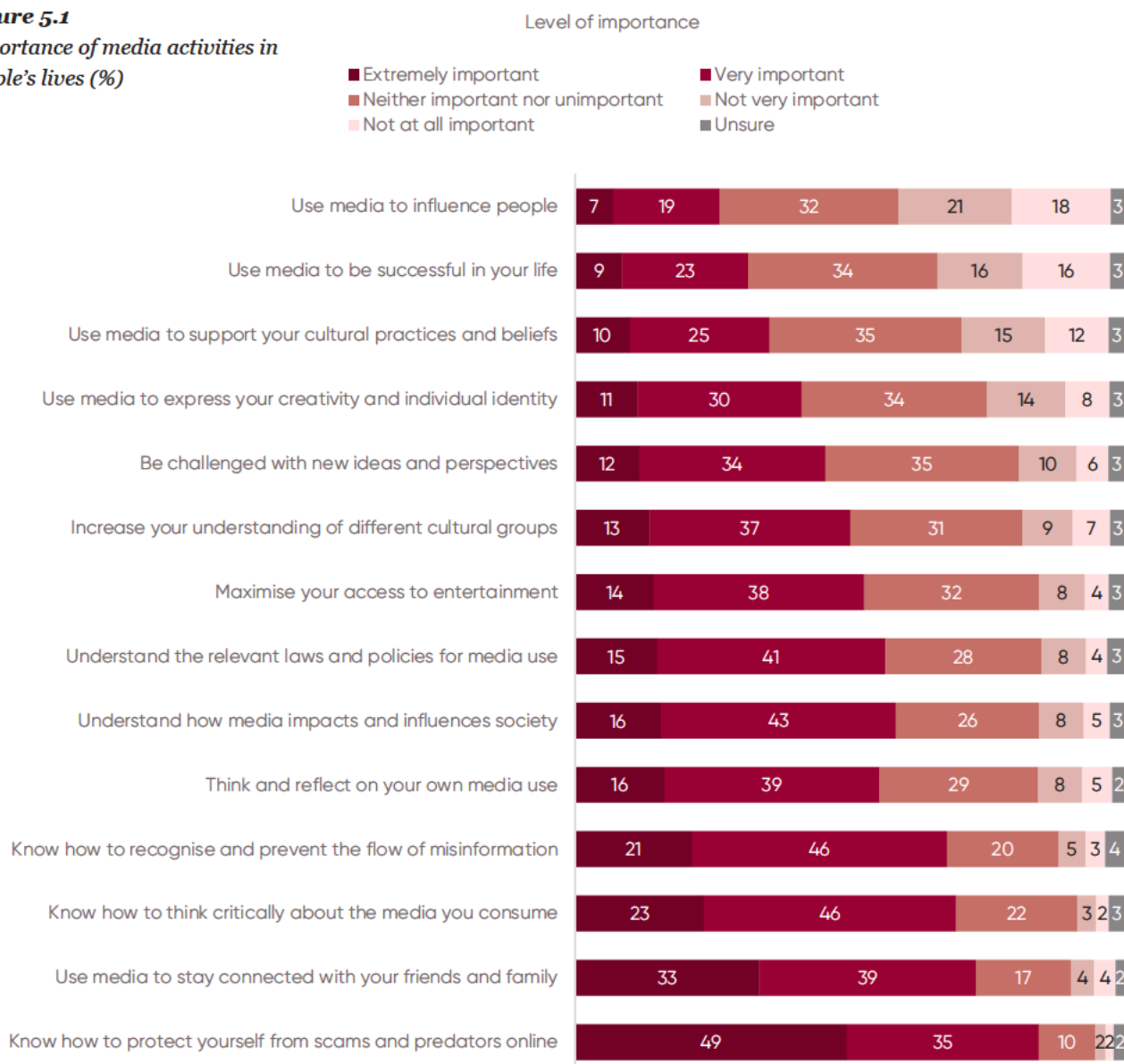
Australians regard knowing how to stay safe online as the most important of the 14 different activities we asked about (see **figure 5.1**). More than four out of five (84%) people believe it is either

very important or *extremely* important to know how to protect themselves from online scams and predators.

Other uses of media that were frequently ranked as important included 'to stay connected with your friends and family' (73%), 'knowing how to think critically about the media you consume' (69%) and 'knowing how to recognise

and prevent the flow of misinformation' (68%). Australians are less likely to think it is important to know how to use media 'to influence people' (26%), 'be successful in life' (31%) or 'to support your cultural practices and beliefs' (35%).

► **Figure 5.1**
Importance of media activities in people's lives (%)



A.1 Thinking about your media use, how important is the following to you?

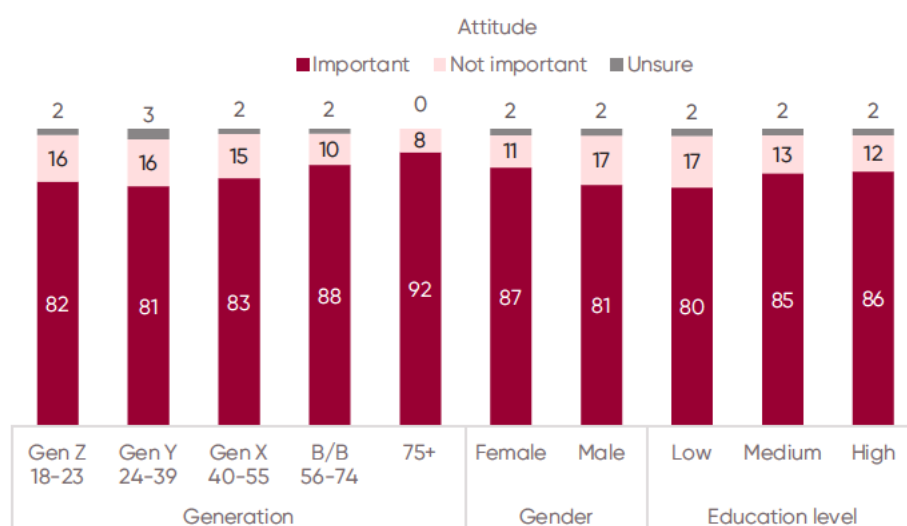
STAYING SAFE ONLINE

People who believe that knowing how to protect themselves online is important are more likely to be older, or women, or have a high level of education, or make use of many different types of media each day (see **figure 5.2**).

People who use at least two different types of media on a daily basis are much more likely to believe that online safety is important in their lives than people who are not daily users of any media. An interest in online safety also increases with age, with Baby Boomers (88%) and those aged 75 or older (92%) more likely to believe it is important than members of Gen Z do (82%) (see **figure 5.3**).

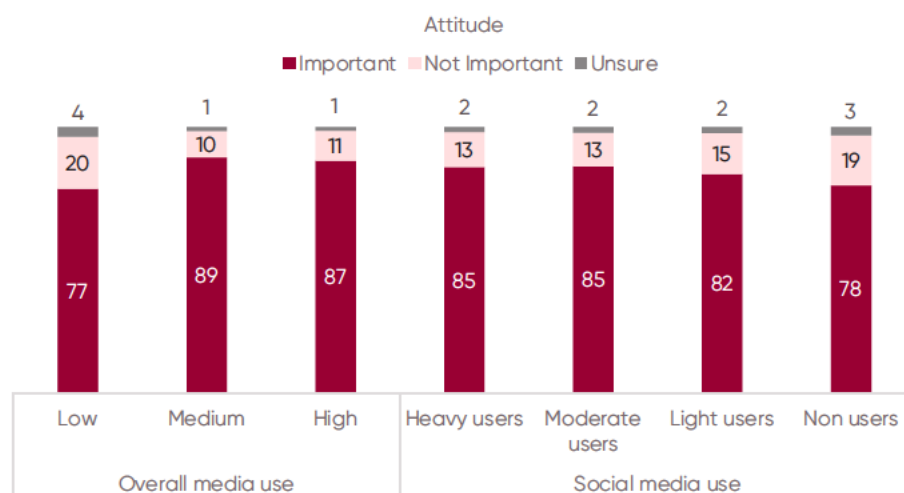
► **Figure 5.2**

Importance placed on being able to protect oneself from scams and predators online, by demographics (%)



► **Figure 5.3**

Importance placed on being able to protect oneself from scams and predators online, by media and social media use (%)



The category of 'important' includes 'very important' and 'extremely important' responses. The category of 'not important' includes 'not very important' and 'not at all important' responses.

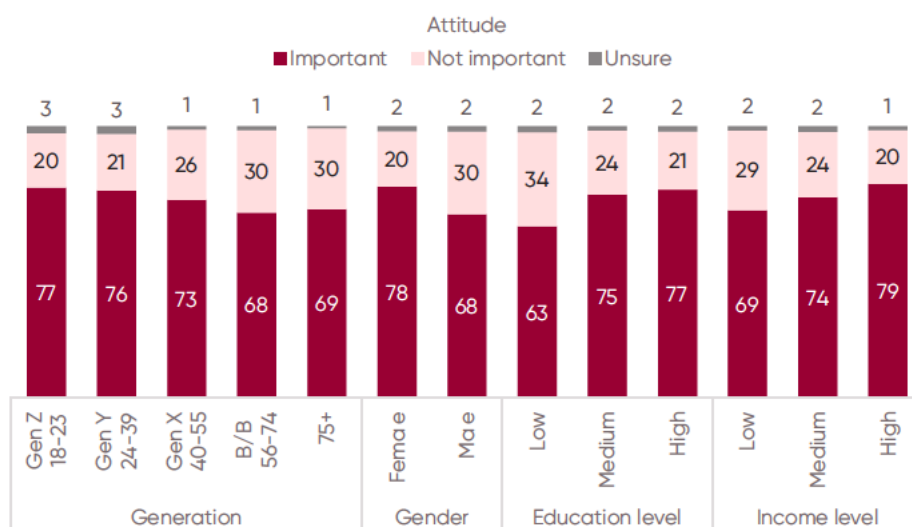
CONNECTING WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Using media to stay connected with friends and family is more important to women, younger adult Australians, those with higher levels of education or income, and people who are CALD (see **figures 5.4** and **5.5**). Increased social media use and overall media use are also strongly associated with believing that connecting with friends and family is important (see **figure 5.5**).

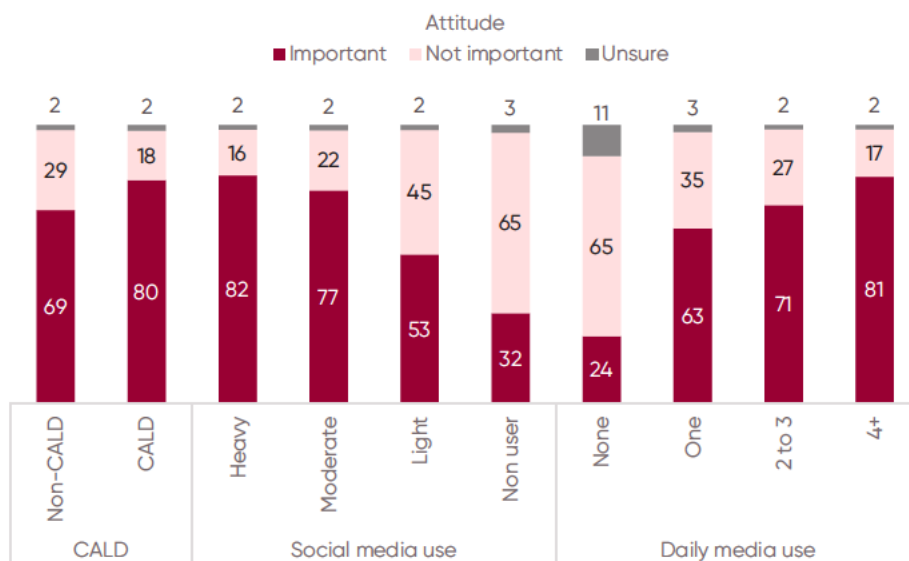
People aged 56 and over (30%), men (30%) and those with a low level of education (34%) are all among groups who are most likely to think that using media to connect with friends and family is not important. The majority of people who don't use social media (65%) say that media is not important for connecting with family; this compares with just 16% of heavy social media users who say it is not important.

CALD Australians are more likely to value the ability to stay connected to friends and family through media (80%) compared to non-CALD people (69%). Those who are heavy media and social media users are more likely to think it is important to stay connected with friends and family through media.

► **Figure 5.4.**
Importance placed on using media to stay connected with friends and family, by demographics (%)



► **Figure 5.5.**
Importance placed on using media to stay connected with friends and family, by CALD, media use and social media use (%)



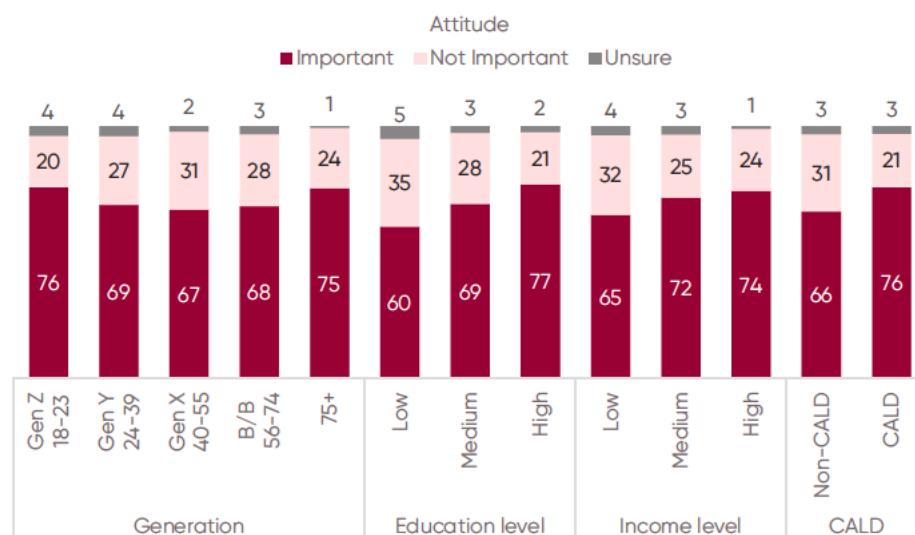
THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT MEDIA CONSUMPTION

Thinking critically about media consumption was rated as the third most important media ability among Australians. Across age groups, Gen Z (76%) and those 75 or older (75%) valued this activity more than other age groups. Those with higher educational attainment, higher income and people who are CALD were more likely to believe this media activity is important (see **figure 5.6**).

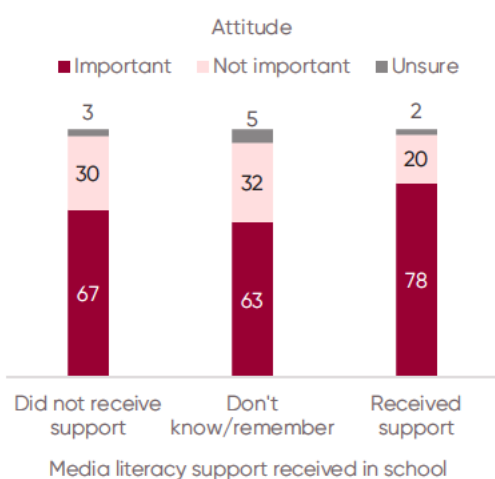
Those who received media literacy support in their lives tend to place greater importance on critical thinking skills when using media (78%) compared with those who didn't receive support (67%), or those who don't know or don't remember if they did (63%) (see **figure 5.7**).

Adults in the highest category of overall media use and heavy social media users tend to value the importance of thinking critically about media. Those familiar with the term 'media literacy' are also more likely to say it is more important to think critically about their own media use (see **figure 5.8**).

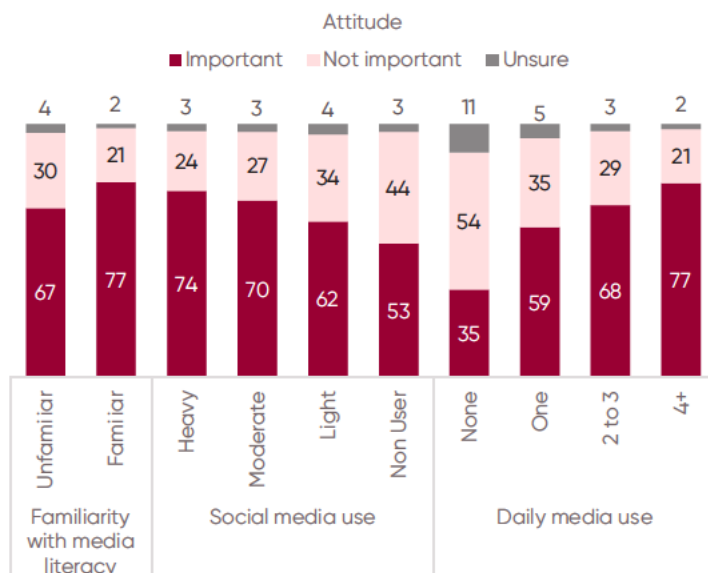
► **Figure 5.6**
Importance placed on using critical thinking about media, by demographics (%)



► **Figure 5.7**
Importance placed on using critical thinking about media, by media literacy support received in primary or secondary school (%)



► **Figure 5.8**
Importance placed on knowing how to think critically about the media you consume, by familiarity with media literacy and media usage (%)



RECOGNISING AND PREVENTING THE FLOW OF MISINFORMATION

Two thirds of Australians (67%) say knowing how to recognise and prevent the flow of misinformation is important to them. Younger generations are more likely than older generations to say that recognising and preventing the flow of misinformation is important. Those with higher educational attainment, CALD Australians, and those who are heavy media and social media users, are all

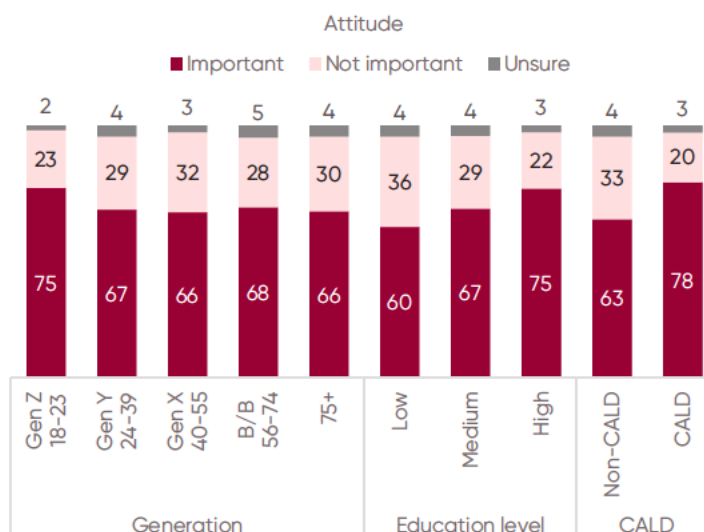
more likely to say that recognising and preventing misinformation is important to them (see **figure 5.9**).

Those who are heavy media users and heavy social media users say recognising misinformation is important, with light media and social media users placing less importance on this ability. A higher number (76%)

of adults who are familiar with the term 'media literacy' say that identifying misinformation is important, when compared with those who are not familiar with this term (65%) (see **figure 5.10**).

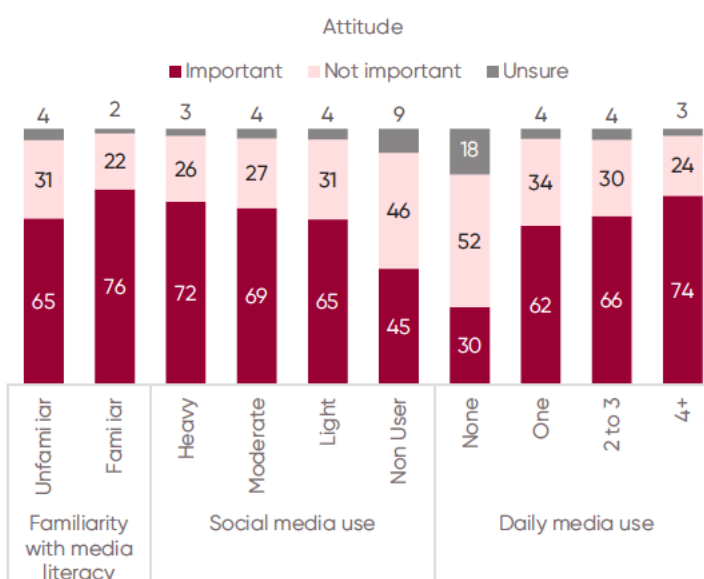
► **Figure 5.9**

Importance placed on recognising and preventing the flow of misinformation, by demographics (%)



► **Figure 5.10**

Importance placed on recognising and preventing the flow of misinformation, by media literacy, media use and social media use (%)



KEY FINDINGS

The survey findings show very clearly that most adults believe media literacy is important across many aspects of their lives. We should note that three of the four media uses that people rate as most important require critical engagement with media: knowing how to think critically about the media, being able to protect yourself from scams and predators online and the ability to recognise and prevent the flow of misinformation. This finding highlights the media literacy concerns that Australians have in the contemporary digital media environment, and emphasises the need for media literacy to go beyond a focus on technical skills in order to support the development of critical abilities.

Those who place a high importance on critical abilities in using media were more likely to be highly educated, high income earners and living in a metropolitan area. A more concerted effort in providing adequate media literacy education for all Australians is needed to overcome this disparity between those who are highly educated, live in high income households, and live in metropolitan areas and the rest of Australia.

Another important aspect of media that people place high importance on is the ability to connect with family and friends. This function of media has become particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many people experienced social isolation and their primary mode of socialising was via media and media technologies. This aspect of media use will continue to be important in Australians' lives as COVID restrictions continue to inhibit mobility, but also as online engagement practices with friends and family become normalised and are more widely accepted among a greater number of people.

THE ROLE OF ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA IN PEOPLE'S LIVES

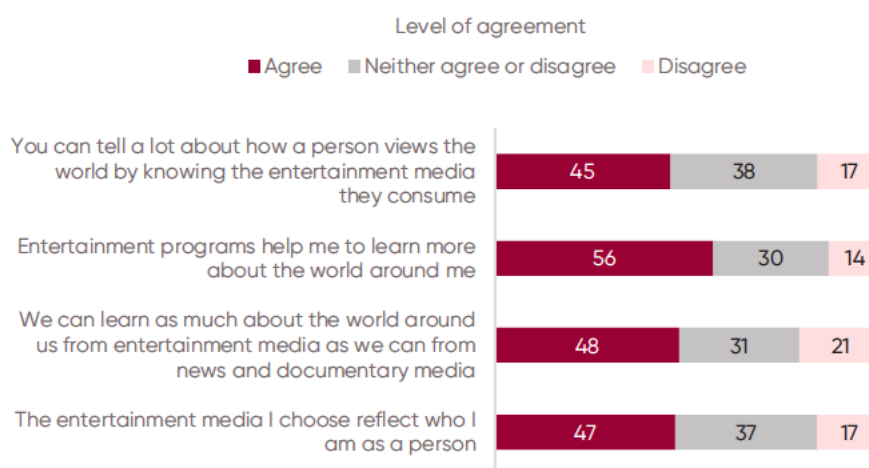
- » Entertainment media play a considerable role in shaping Australians' understanding of themselves and the world around them.
 - » Education level, age, cultural and linguistic diversity (CALD), and region type are all factors associated with people's level of critical engagement with entertainment media.
 - » People who place more emphasis on the role played by entertainment media are also more likely to believe in the importance of being critical consumers of media.
-

ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA OFFER MORE THAN PASSIVE CONSUMPTION

Almost half the population tends to *agree* or *strongly agree* that entertainment media play an important role in constructing our sense of self and our knowledge about the world around us, while only one fifth or fewer disagree. These findings suggest that people reflect on the impact of entertainment media on society, and they recognise that entertainment media influence the way people develop their own knowledge about the world and their ideas about cultural and social norms and identity.

The highest level of agreement is with the statement that '*Entertainment programs help me to learn more about the world around me*' (56%). The highest level of disagreement is with the statement that '*We can learn as much about the world around us from entertainment media as we can from news and documentary media*' (21%), however, people were more than twice as likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement (48%) than to disagree (see **figure 6.1**).

► **Figure 6.1**
Level of agreement with
four statements about
entertainment media (%)

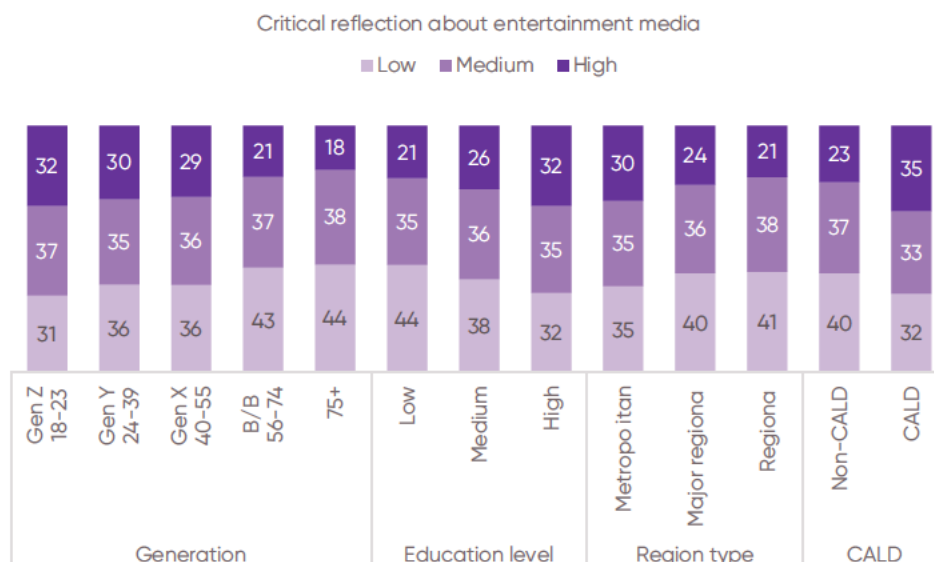


REFLECTIVE CONSUMPTION OF ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA

Age, education level, region and cultural background all show an association with the degree to which people reflect on their own and others' use of entertainment media (see **figure 6.2**). Gen Z Australians are almost twice as likely to have a high level of critical reflection about entertainment media (32%) when compared with those aged 75 or older (18%).

People who are CALD are the group most likely to be critically reflective entertainment media consumers. More than one third (35%) of CALD Australians support statements that suggest they are critically reflective about entertainment media, compared with 23% for non-CALD Australians.

► **Figure 6.2**
Critical reflection about entertainment media, by demographics (%)

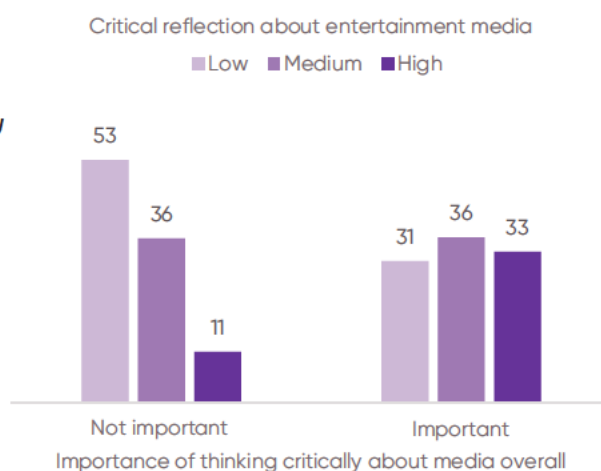


ATTITUDES TO CRITICAL REFLECTION AND ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA

Australians who are critically reflective about entertainment media are also more likely to believe in the importance of being critical consumers of media overall. Among people who think it is *very* or *extremely* important to know how to think critically about the media they consume, one third (33%) were

among the most critically reflective about entertainment media. This compares to just one in ten (11%) of those who regarded thinking critically about media as unimportant (see **figure 6.3**).

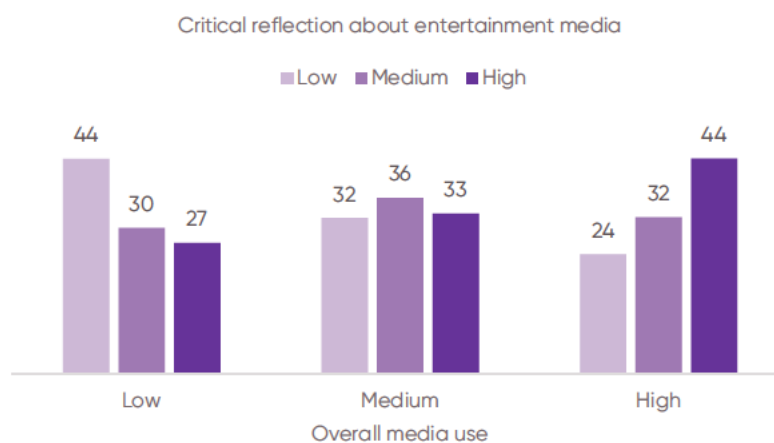
► **Figure 6.3**
Critical reflection about entertainment media, by attitude to thinking critically about media (%)



HIGH MEDIA CONSUMERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE REFLECTIVE ABOUT ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA

People who are most critically reflective about entertainment media are also more likely to be frequent consumers of diverse types of media (see **figure 6.4**). Of those who are most critically reflective about entertainment media, nearly twice as many also fall into the highest category of overall media use (44%) when compared to the lowest category of media use (24%).

► **Figure 6.4**
Critical reflection about entertainment media, by overall media use (%)



KEY FINDINGS

We asked Australian adults to reflect on their beliefs about entertainment media because we were interested in how critically reflective they were about entertainment media — particularly about the role it plays in their own lives and the lives of others, which is one indicator of media literacy².

It is significant that so many Australian adults say that entertainment media play an important role in their lives in relation to their own and others' identity construction and how they and others learn about the world. These findings provide evidence that many Australians are critically engaging with entertainment media, while also suggesting that many Australians value the role these media play in society. Perhaps the most surprising finding here is that many Australians say that entertainment media are as important as information-based media when it comes to how they learn about the world. This finding shows us that Australians believe that entertainment media have social, cultural and educational functions in society. On average, those who are younger, better educated, more metropolitan or who are culturally and linguistically diverse people are more likely to believe this, and are therefore more likely to critically reflect on the role of entertainment media in society.

In contrast to some assumptions about heavy users of entertainment media being passive or uncritical, we found that the more people use various forms of entertainment media, the more open they are to critical reflection about entertainment media.

Overall, these findings emphasise that entertainment media play a very important role in the lives of many Australians. In recent years, in response to anxieties about the impact of mis- and disinformation, media literacy policies and initiatives have focused on news and information media. However, these survey findings remind us that people form worldviews, develop their own identity, and increase their knowledge of the world from entertainment media as well. Therefore, media literacy policies and initiatives that are inclusive of entertainment media are needed.

² The Australian Media Literacy Framework suggests that the ability to reflect on one's own and others' media use is an important media literacy ability.

ATTITUDES TOWARD ADDRESSING MEDIA ISSUES

-
- » Australians are much more likely to identify ‘fake news’ (74%) and online privacy (68%) as issues that need to be addressed than they are to identify the issue of racially insensitive content on television (40%).
 - » Indigenous Australians (68%) and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people (53%) are far more likely to believe racially insensitive content on television is an issue that needs to be addressed than are non-Indigenous (39%) and non-CALD people (34%).
 - » People consistently say digital and traditional media companies have the highest level of responsibility for dealing with these issues, followed by the government.
 - » Schools and education programs are regarded as the least responsible for addressing these issues.
-

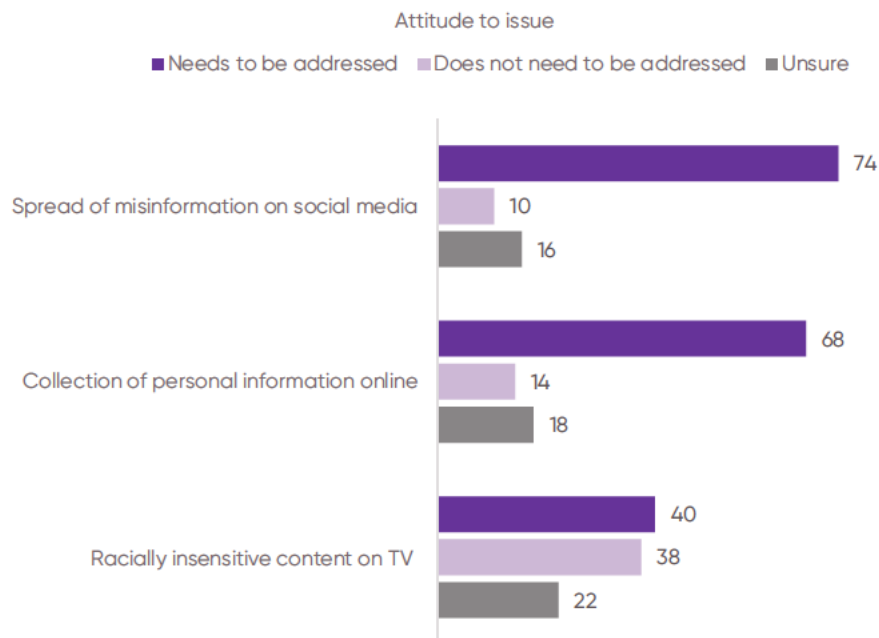
THE MEDIA ISSUES THAT MATTER MOST TO AUSTRALIANS

We asked respondents about three current issues relating to media, whether Australians think these issues need to be addressed and if so, who they believe is the most (and least) responsible for addressing each issue. The majority (74%) of Australians say the spread of misinformation is an issue that needs to be addressed in Australia. The majority of Australians (68%) also believe the collection of personal information online is an issue that needs to be addressed. Fewer than half of all adult Australians (40%) say racially insensitive content on television is an issue that needs to be addressed (see **figure 7.1**).

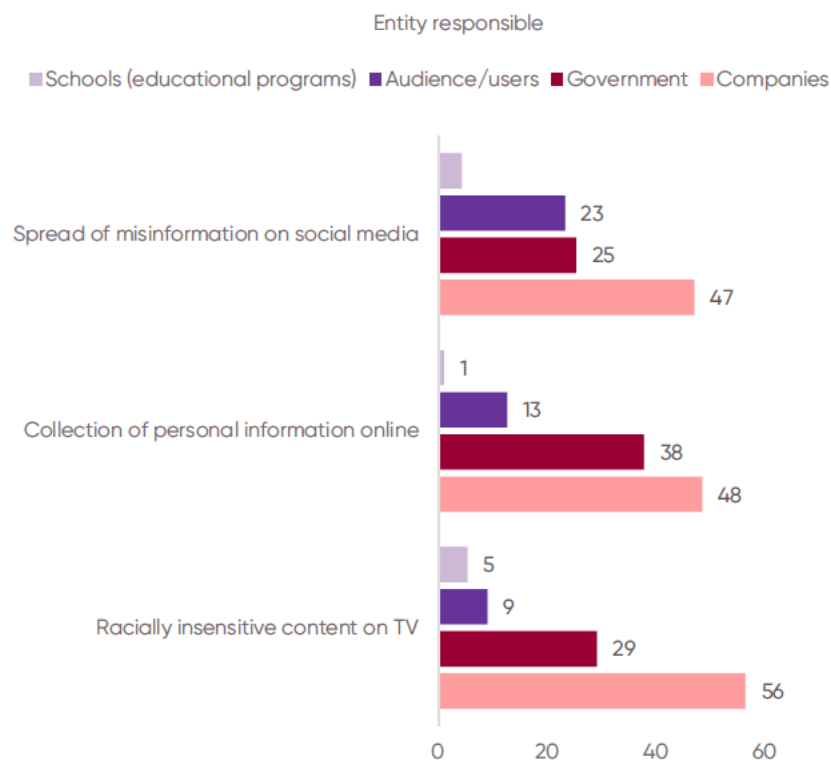
We also asked people who is the most responsible for dealing with these issues. Looking across the three issues, the greatest responsibility is placed on media companies, with 56% saying television companies are responsible for the content on television, 48% saying the companies that collect information are responsible and 47% saying social media companies should be responsible for fake news. The second most important party responsible for reducing these media or online harms is the government, and third is audiences or online users (see **figure 7.2**).

The survey findings also show significant levels of uncertainty as to whether each of these issues need to be addressed (see **figure 7.1**). Interestingly, uncertainty was highest when it came to the question about racially insensitive content on television with 22% saying they were unsure if this is an issue that needs to be addressed. This suggests that uncertainty about media regulation needs and issues is not restricted to issues that arise from the use of new and emerging platforms.

► **Figure 7.1**
Attitudes to issues in Australian media (%)



► **Figure 7.2**
Most responsible party by issue (%)

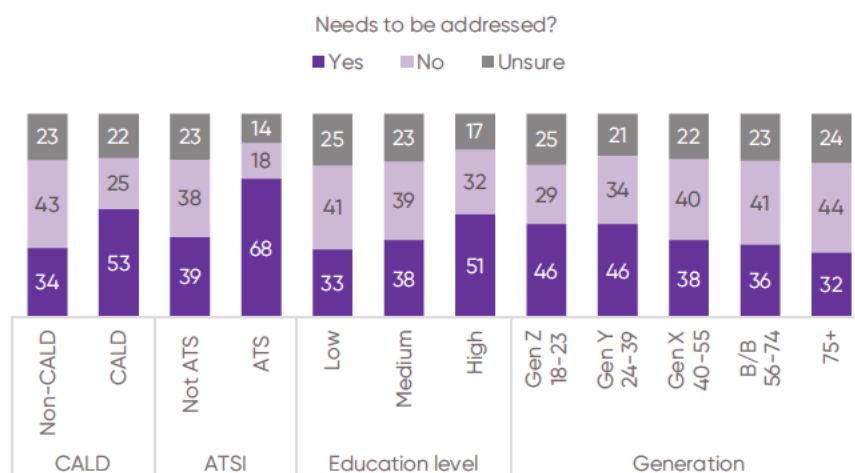


ATTITUDES TO ADDRESSING RACIALLY INSENSITIVE CONTENT ON TELEVISION

While only 40% of Australians believe that racially insensitive content on television is an issue that needs to be addressed, attitudes varied considerably based on a number of demographic variables (see **figure 7.3**). Groups that were more likely to have a lived experience of racial discrimination were much more likely to consider this to be an issue, with more than half of CALD people (53%) and more than two thirds of Indigenous Australians (68%) believing that the issue needs to be addressed. Greater recognition was also given to this issue by younger Australians and by those with a higher level of education.

► **Figure 7.3**

Is racially insensitive content on television an issue that needs to be addressed?, by demographics (%)



R.3 Television programs sometimes receive complaints for being racist or racially insensitive. Do you think this is an issue that needs to be addressed in Australia?

ADDRESSING MISINFORMATION OR 'FAKE NEWS'

Among the 74% of people who believe that the spread of misinformation on social media is an issue that needs to be addressed in Australia, almost half (47%) believe that primary responsibility for this issue should fall to the social media companies themselves (see **figure 7.4**). Close to one

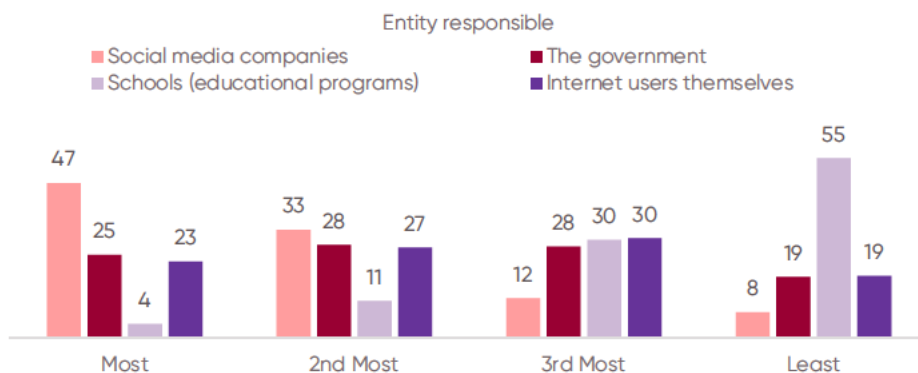
quarter of Australians believed either the government (25%) or internet users themselves (23%) were most responsible for addressing this issue.

The responsibility given to schools and education programs was considerably lower. Just 4% of people believe

schools are most responsible for addressing this issue, with more than half (55%) believing schools are the least responsible for addressing the issue of misinformation on social media, after media companies, government and media users.

► **Figure 7.4**

Responsibility for addressing the spread of misinformation or 'fake news', by most to least responsible (%)



R.1 Social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter) are sometimes associated with the spread of misinformation or 'fake' news. Do you think this is an issue that needs to be addressed in Australia? [Base N = 2,453, among those who felt this was an issue that needs to be addressed in Australia]

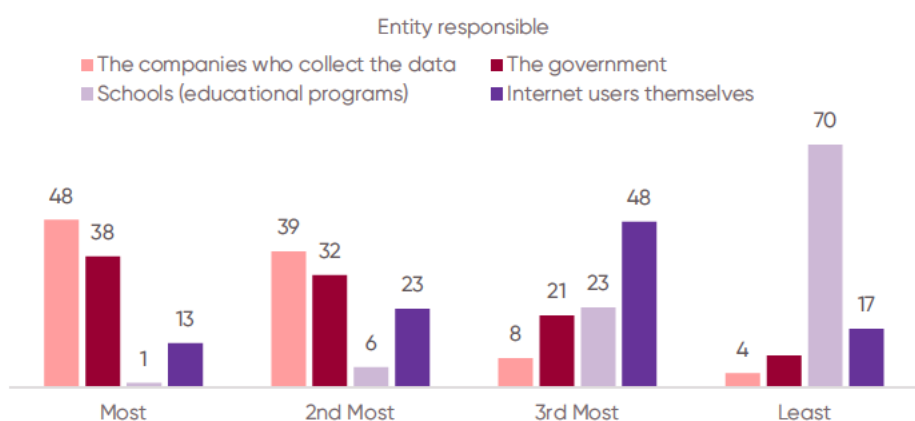
ADDRESSING ONLINE PRIVACY CONCERNS

For those Australians (68%) who consider the collection and sharing of sensitive online data an issue that needs to be addressed, just under half (48%) believe it is the companies themselves that have most responsibility for addressing this issue (see **figure 7.5**),

followed by the government (38%). Unlike for the spread of fake news, however, Australians are far less likely to place responsibility for addressing this privacy issue onto internet users themselves. While one quarter (23%) of people felt that individuals were most

responsible for addressing the issue of fake news, just 13% believe individuals have primary responsibility when the issue shifts to managing personal data online.

► **Figure 7.5**
Responsibility for addressing people's privacy needs in the collection and sharing of sensitive data online, by most to least responsible (%)



R.5 Companies collect and share online data about people that may be considered sensitive or may violate people's privacy. Do you think this is an issue that needs to be addressed in Australia? [Base N = 2,270, among those who felt this was an issue that needs to be addressed in Australia]

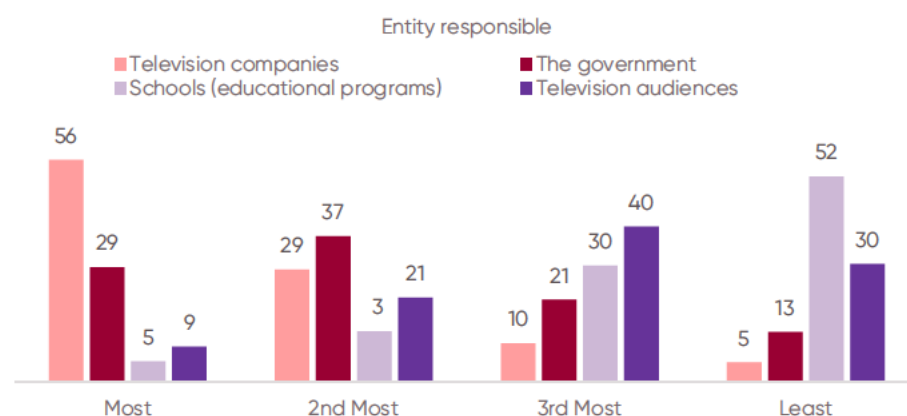
RESPONSIBILITY FOR ADDRESSING RACIALLY INSENSITIVE CONTENT ON TELEVISION

While less than half of all Australian adults (40%) believe that racially insensitive content on television is an issue that needs to be addressed, the majority of those who do believe this

is an issue that needs to be addressed also believe that primary responsibility lies with television companies (56%, see **figure 7.6**). This is followed by government (29%), with only a small

proportion of people believing that audiences (9%) or schools (5%) should be primarily responsible.

► **Figure 7.6**
Responsibility for addressing racially insensitive content on television, by most to least responsible (%)



KEY FINDINGS

There is a distinct difference between the number of Australian adults who believe something needs to be done to address the issue of misinformation on social media (74%) and the protection of people's personal information online (68%) and those who believe something needs to be done to address racially insensitive content on television (40%). More than one third (38%) of people said that racially insensitive content on television was not an issue that required any attention.

These findings may reflect the high profile that 'fake news' and online privacy have received in mainstream media coverage over the course of recent years. In comparison, racially insensitive material on television is a perennial problem, but typically a low-profile issue in the mainstream media. These findings may also reflect an understanding that while television is subject to established national regulatory requirements, the internet remains largely unregulated.

It is not surprising that both Indigenous and CALD Australians differed from the general population in their perspectives on racially insensitive material on television. Both groups are more likely to have a lived experience of racial discrimination and both groups show significantly more desire to see something done in response to this issue.

Of those Australian adults who believe misinformation on social media and online privacy are problems that need to be addressed, the majority believe social media companies are most responsible for providing solutions, followed by the government.

With regard to racially insensitive material on television, of those who believe there needs to be change, the majority (56%) believe that television companies are responsible, while there is less expectation for the government to be responsible (29%) than with the other two issues we asked about.

These findings suggest that Australian adults may be more in favour of media companies self-regulating than they are of government-enforced regulation.

In all three instances, most people who believed these issues need to be addressed also believed individuals and schools were the least responsible for addressing these issues. While it may seem surprising that most Australians rated schools the least responsible for addressing all three issues, this finding does not suggest that people believe schools do not have a role to play. Rather, the findings suggest that people do not believe schools should be made primarily responsible for addressing these issues.

DEALING WITH OFFENSIVE MEDIA CONTENT

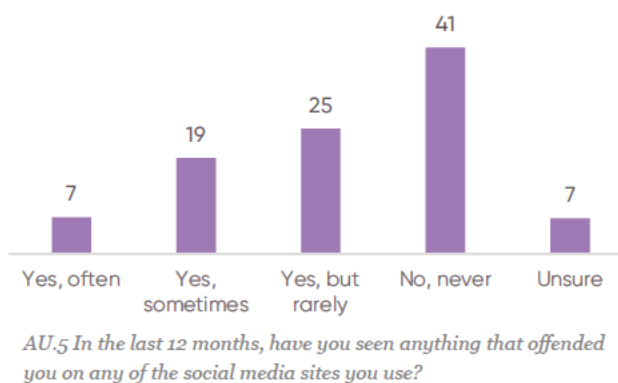
- » More than half of all adult Australians (52%) who use social media have encountered social media content that has offended them in the last 12 months.
 - » Indigenous people and those with high levels of education are more likely to report having frequently encountered social media content that they found offensive.
 - » For those people who have encountered offensive material on social media, one in ten (10%) took no action because they didn't know how to respond.
 - » Under one third (32%) of Australians have seen content on television that has offended them in the last 12 months.
 - » People who encounter offensive content are much more likely to lodge a complaint if they encounter that content on social media (20%) than on television (5%).
-

ENCOUNTERING OFFENSIVE CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Of the 91% of Australians who use social media, about a quarter (26%) of these people have *sometimes* or *often* encountered content that has offended them in the last 12 months (see **figure 8.1**). Encountering offensive content

was most commonly reported to be a rare occurrence (25%) and 41% say they have not seen anything that offended them in the past 12 months.

► **Figure 8.1**
*Experience of
offensive content on
social media (%)*

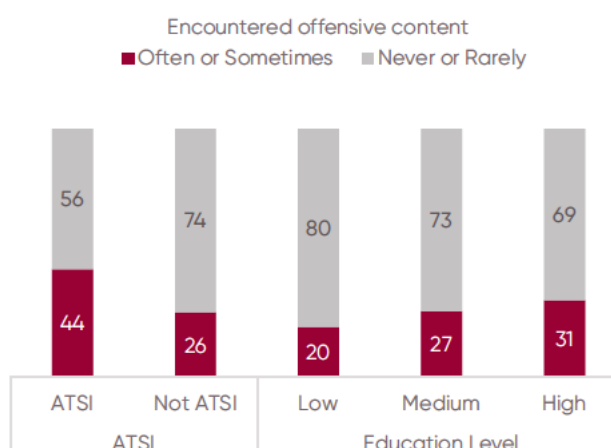


SOME AUSTRALIANS ARE MORE LIKELY TO ENCOUNTER OR RECOGNISE CONTENT THAT IS OFFENSIVE

Regardless of how often they use social media, both Indigenous and highly educated Australians are more likely to report having frequently seen content that offended them on social media in the last 12 months. Just one quarter of non-Indigenous Australians (26%) often or sometimes encounter offensive material, however this figure

climbs to 44% for Indigenous Australians (see **figure 8.2**). Education also appears to play a role in being able to recognise content as offensive, with highly educated people more likely to report they had seen offensive content (31%) than those with a low level of education (20%).

► **Figure 8.2**
*Frequency of
seeing offensive
content on social
media in the past
12 months, by
demographics (%)*



RESPONDING TO OFFENSIVE CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Among those who have encountered offensive content on social media, one third (33%) have responded by blocking the person responsible (see **figure 8.3**). Among the 20% of people who have responded by lodging a complaint, 19% had complained to the social media company while just

2% had complained to the eSafety Commissioner. One in ten (10%) people reported that they had not taken any action because they did not know how to.

► **Figure 8.3**
Actions taken by people who have encountered offensive content on social media (%)



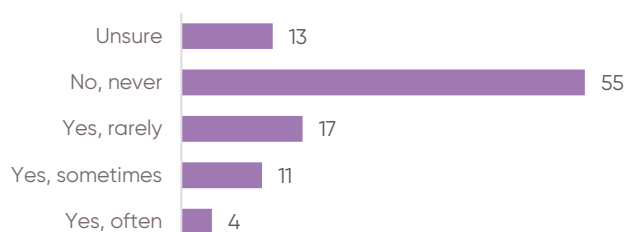
AU.6 Did you take any of the following actions as a result of seeing this offensive content? (choose as many as apply) [N = 1,649]

ENCOUNTERING OFFENSIVE CONTENT ON TELEVISION

People are less likely to report offensive content when they encountered it on television than when they came across it on social media. Less than one third of Australians (32%) said they had encountered content on television that offended them in the past year (see **figure 8.4**). Encountering offensive content was most commonly

reported to be a *rare occurrence* (17%), with a smaller proportion of people reporting that they encounter such content *sometimes* (11%) or *often* (4%). By contrast, more than half (55%) of all Australians reported that they had *never* seen anything that had offended them on television in the past 12 months.

► **Figure 8.4**
Experience of offensive content on television (%)



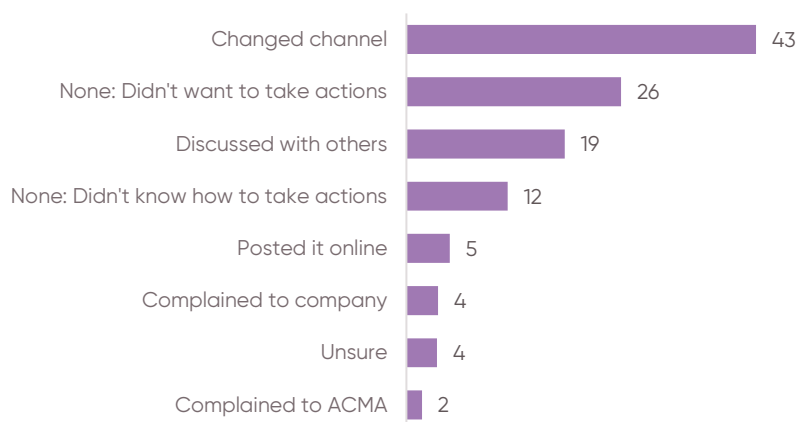
AU.7 Have you seen anything that offended you in the last 12 months on television (free to air or satellite television only)?

RESPONDING TO OFFENSIVE CONTENT ON TELEVISION

Among those who did encounter offensive content on television in the last 12 months, almost half (43%) responded by changing the channel (see **figure 8.5**). Lodging a formal complaint in response to offensive content was a much less common response in the context of television (5%) than for social media (20%). Of

those who made complaints about television content, 4% lodged a complaint with the television channel while just 2% complained to either the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) or Ad Standards. One in ten (12%) people reported that they had not taken any action because they did not know how to.

► **Figure 8.5**
Actions taken by people who have encountered offensive content on television in the last 12 months (%)



AU.8 Did you take any of the following actions as a result of seeing this offensive content? (choose as many as apply)

KEY FINDINGS

In contrast to plentiful public conversations that suggest online experiences are frequently negative, only a quarter (26%) of Australian adults say they encountered online content that offended them often or sometimes the past 12 months. Of these, only a small percentage (7%) said this was a frequent occurrence, while a further 17% said they were sometimes offended. Another 25% said it was a rare occurrence and 41% did not experience any offensive material.

However, some groups are more likely to encounter or recognise offensive material online than others. A significant number of Indigenous Australians (44%) said they often or sometimes see offensive material. More highly educated Australians say they are exposed to offensive material often or sometimes (31%) when compared with the national average (20%).

When they encounter offensive material online, Australians are more likely to respond in passive and informal ways than they are to make an official complaint. The most frequent action is to block a person or an account on a social media platform (33%), or to simply ignore the encounter (32%). Only 14% said they had replied directly to a person or account sharing offensive material. If people made an official complaint, it was most often directed to the social media platform (19%). Only a small percentage (2%) made a complaint to the eSafety Commissioner's office.

Television is less frequently identified than social media as a site of exposure to offensive material. The majority of Australian adults (55%) had not been exposed to offensive material on television in the past 12 months. A small percentage (4%) said they were frequently exposed to such material.

As is the case with social media, when adult Australians encounter offensive material on television, most respond in a passive and informal way, rather than make an official complaint. Most changed the channel (43%), more than a quarter did nothing (26%), while almost one fifth (19%) discussed the content with someone else. Only a small percentage (4%) made a complaint to the television channel, and even fewer (2%) complained to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA).

Of concern is that a significant number of both social media users (10%) and television viewers (12%) did not take any action at all after seeing offensive material, because they did not know how. Media literacy can support Australians by making them aware of the range of options they have to take action to address offensive material, so that they can make an informed decision about how best to respond.

ACCESS TO MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION AND SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES

-
- » Online resources (45%), friends (42%) and family (41%) are the most frequent sources of support to help people access, use and create media.
 - » Family is the source most people identify as having provided the most media literacy support (25%).
 - » Almost half of all Australians (47%) have received no support from the listed options or have drawn on just one source of support to help them engage with media across their lifetime.
 - » People's primary source of support to help them to access, analyse or use media is influenced by their age, education level and the type of region in which they live.
 - » More than four out of five (81%) Australians agree that children should receive media literacy education at school.
-

SOURCES OF SUPPORT TO ACCESS, USE AND CREATE MEDIA

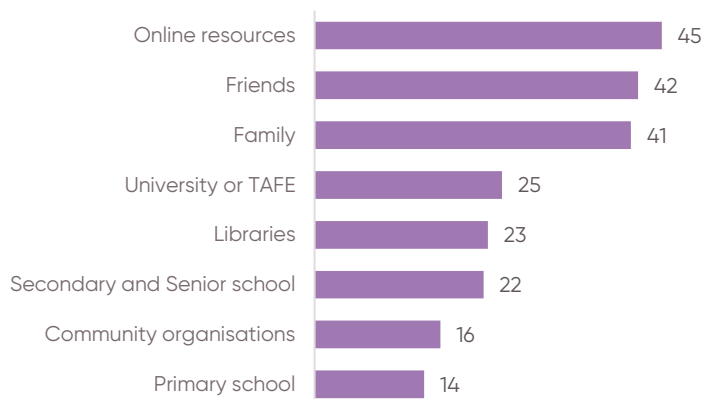
The most common sources of support used by people are online resources, which 45% of Australians have used; friends (42%) and family (41%) (see

figure 9.1). Despite the existence of media literacy programs in Australian schools, primary (14%) and secondary schools (22%) were cited as less

common sources of support than tertiary educational institutions (25%) and libraries (23%).

► **Figure 9.1**

Source of support to access/use/create media (%)



E.1 Across your lifetime, have any of the following provided you with support to help you access, use, understand and/or create media?

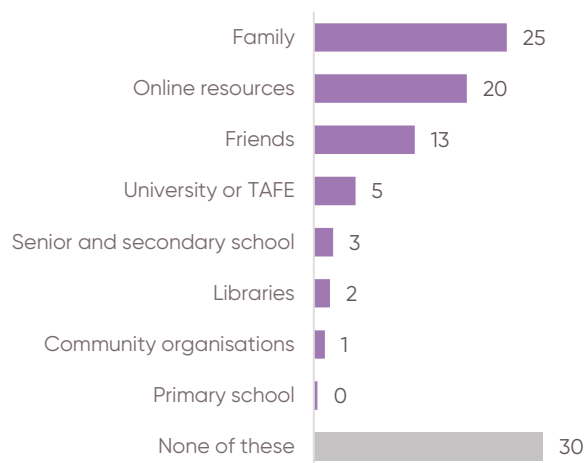
FAMILY ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT SOURCE OF SUPPORT FOR MEDIA PARTICIPATION

While Australians reported that they rely upon a range of sources to help them use media across their lifetimes (see **figure 9.1**), family (25%) and online resources (20%) stand out as having provided the most support (see

figure 9.2). Community sources, such as libraries (2%) and community organisations (1%), were rarely a primary source of support for people in their use of media.

► **Figure 9.2**

Main source of support to access/use/create media (%)

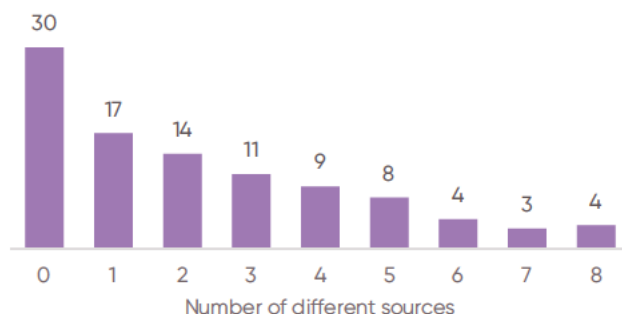


E.3 Which has provided you with the MOST support? (tick only one)

MOST PEOPLE HAVE HAD ACCESS TO FEW SOURCES OF MEDIA LITERACY SUPPORT IN THEIR LIFETIME

Almost half of Australians had either no support (30%) or had access to only one (17%) source of support for their media participation. One quarter (25%) of people experienced two to three different sources of support, with slightly more (28%) having used between four and eight sources (see **figure 9.3**).

► **Figure 9.3**
Number of different sources of support to access/use/create media across lifetime (%)



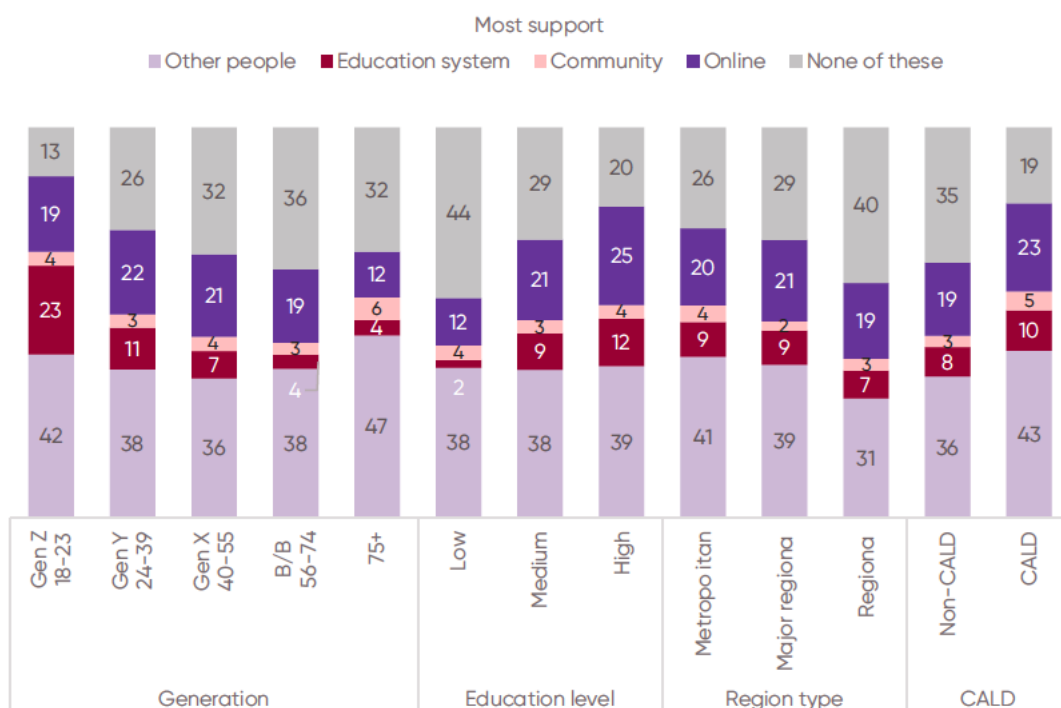
SOURCES OF SUPPORT VARY BY DEMOGRAPHICS

Gen Z are much more likely to nominate the education system as their main source of support for engaging with media (23%) when compared with Baby Boomers (4%) and those aged 75 or older (4%) (see **figure 9.4**). Online resources are twice as likely to be the

main source of support for people with a high level of education (25%) than they are for people with a low level of education (12%). Those with a low level of education are also the group who are least likely to have any source of support to assist with media

participation (44%). People living in regional Australia are less likely to have the support of other people (family or friends) (31%) as their main source of support.

► **Figure 9.4**
Source of most support to access/use/create media, by demographics (%)

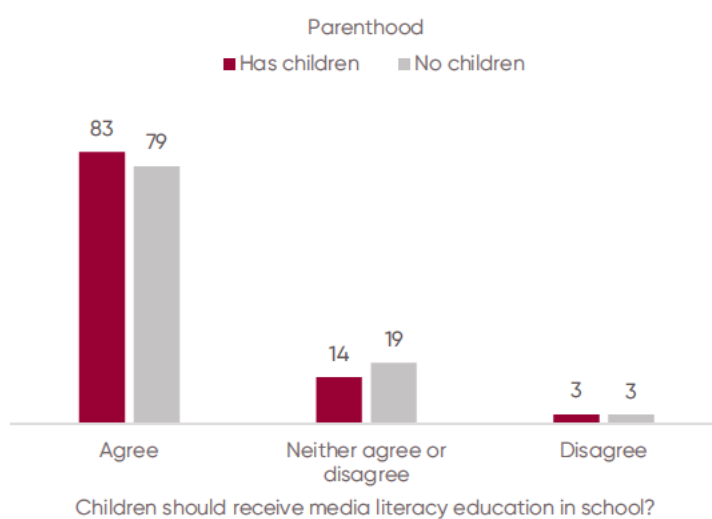


AUSTRALIANS ARE OVERWHELMINGLY IN SUPPORT OF CHILDREN RECEIVING MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION AT SCHOOL

There is an overwhelming level of support for children receiving media literacy education at school, with more than four out of five Australians (81%) strongly or somewhat agreeing with this proposition and only 3% expressing

disagreement. People without children were more likely to have a neutral response but were not more likely to disagree with the statement (see **figure 9.5**).

► **Figure 9.5**
Attitude to media literacy education in schools, by parenthood (%)



E.4 Do you agree or disagree that children should receive media literacy education at school?

KEY FINDINGS

Media literacy education can provide a way to ensure all citizens receive at least some support to develop their ability to access, use, analyse and create media and to develop critical thinking around their media use. This may occur formally through structured education programs in schools, libraries or community organisations, or informally through skills and knowledge being shared among family and friends, or online. It may also occur through self-education using 'how-to' and Do-it-Yourself (DIY) media, using digital platforms like YouTube.

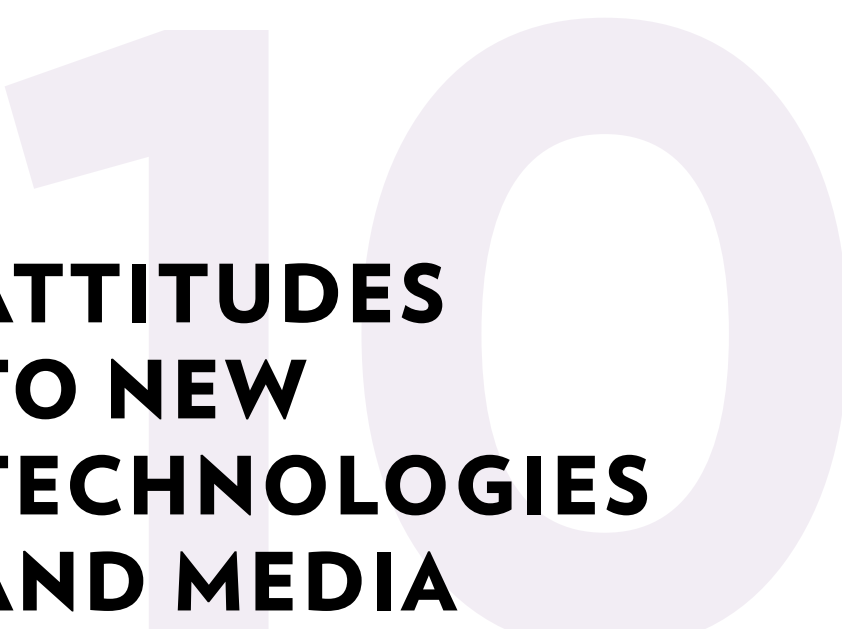
We found that in Australia, media literacy is mostly supported through informal networks. Family (41%), friends (42%) and online resources (45%) are significantly more likely to be sources of support than are primary school (14 %), secondary school (22%), higher education (25%), libraries (23%) or community organisations (16%). However, it is worth noting that those with a lower level of education are far less likely to use online resources to get help with media activities.

When asked to identify who had helped them the most, family (25%) and online resources (20%) were identified as the top sources. Perhaps surprisingly, educational institutions were identified as the main source of assistance by relatively small numbers of people: primary and secondary school (3%), University or TAFE (5%), libraries (2%), and community organisations (1%).

It makes sense that people would turn to those closest to them for assistance with media participation. Nonetheless, these findings show that educational institutions are playing a comparatively small role in Australians' media literacy education and there is an opportunity to consider how such institutions can better meet people's needs. This is particularly significant given that almost one third (30%) of Australians indicated that they had not received any media literacy support from the listed sources. The findings show that older, less well educated and lower income Australians have less access to both formal and informal sources of media literacy assistance.

The majority (61%) of Australians have no or fewer than two sources of support. Very few have received support from five (8%) or six (4%) sources. This potentially raises concerns about Australians' ability to develop media literacy across their lifetimes.

On the other hand, Australian adults recognise the need for more formal approaches to media literacy education. While Australian adults say school has played a relatively minor role in the development of their own media ability, they overwhelmingly believe children should receive media literacy education at school (81%). This significant level of support for media literacy in schools indicates that Australians believe formal education should play a more central role in the development of media literacy.



ATTITUDES TO NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND MEDIA CONSUMPTION

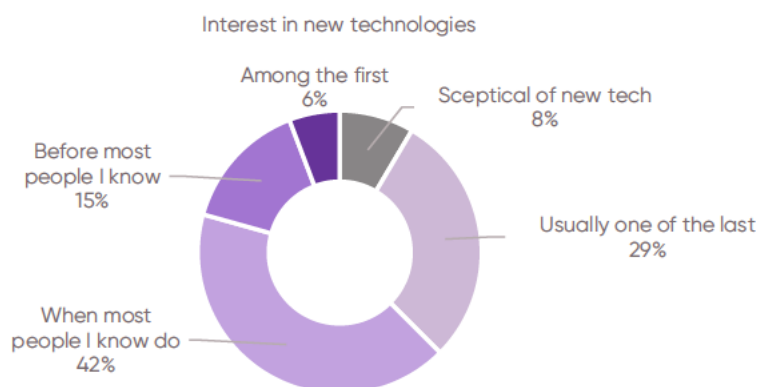
- » More than one third (37%) of adult Australians have little interest in using new technologies or are sceptical of them.
 - » Technology sceptics consume less digital media.
 - » Indigenous Australians are among the groups more likely to have a low level of interest in using new technologies.
 - » People living with disability, those with low levels of education and older Australians have lower levels of interest in new technologies.
-

ATTITUDES TO NEW TECHNOLOGIES

More than one third (37%) of Australians are sceptical or have little interest in using new technologies (see **figure 10.1**), while 42% say they have the same level of interest as most

people they know, and 21% consider themselves more interested than most people they know.

► **Figure 10.1**
Interest in new technologies (%)



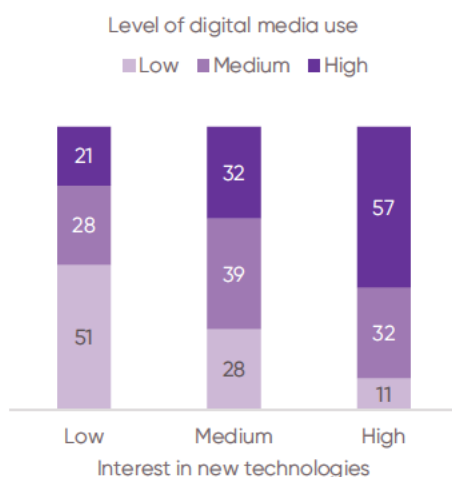
When it comes to technology, which best describes you?

NEW TECHNOLOGY SCEPTICS CONSUME LESS MAINSTREAM DIGITAL MEDIA

People who have a sceptical attitude towards new and emerging technologies, or who are among the last to use them, are also lower overall consumers of digital media (see **figure 10.2**). More than half (51%) of Australian adults with a low level

of interest in new technologies also fall into the lowest category for digital media use. For people who identify as liking or loving new technologies, the corresponding figure of low digital media use falls to just one in ten (11%).

► **Figure 10.2**
Overall digital media use, by interest in new technologies (%)

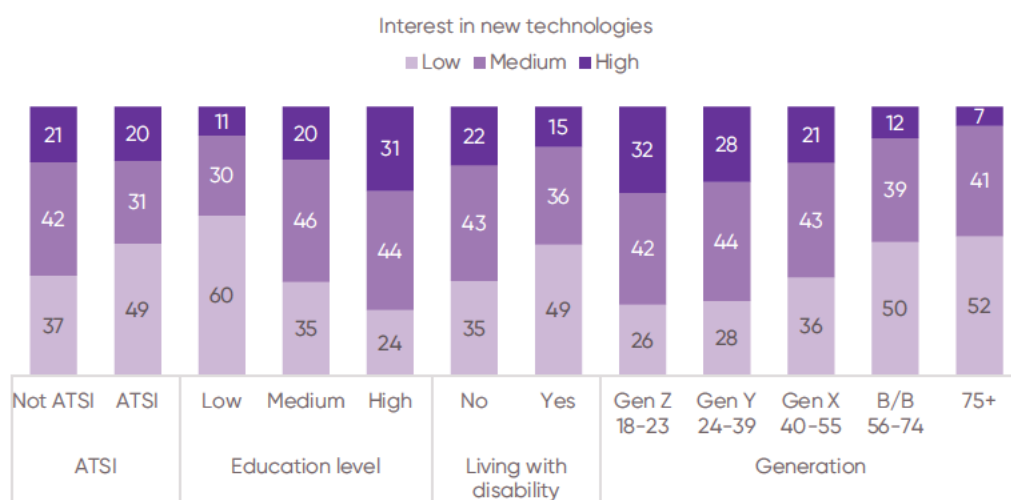


INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS ARE AMONG THOSE LESS INTERESTED IN NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Indigenous Australians are among those who are more likely to have a low level of interest in using new technologies (see **figure 10.3**). Half of the Indigenous respondents (49%) show a low level interest in new technology, compared with 37% of

non-Indigenous people. Lower interest in new technologies is also found among people living with disability (49%), those with low levels of education (60%), and Australians aged 56 or older.

► **Figure 10.3**
Interest in new technologies, by demographics (%)

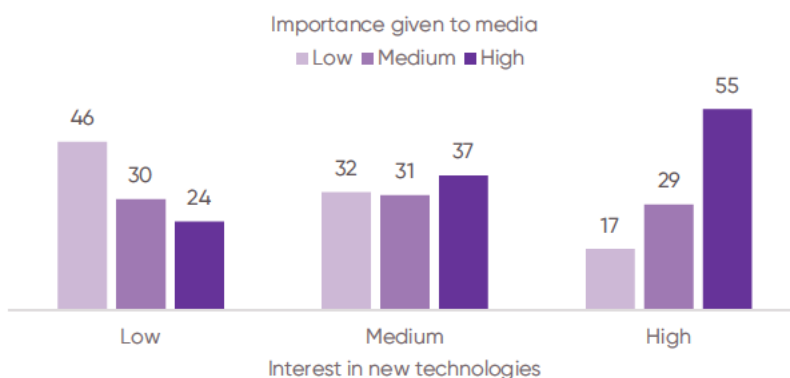


INTEREST IN NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND VALUING THE ROLE OF MEDIA

Australians who have a more favourable attitude toward using new technologies also tend to place greater importance on the role media plays in their lives (see **figure 10.4**). Among people who say they like or love new technologies, more than half (55%) are among

those who most highly value media as important in their lives. By contrast, just one quarter (24%) of people with a low level of interest in new technologies placed a high level of importance on the role media plays in their lives.

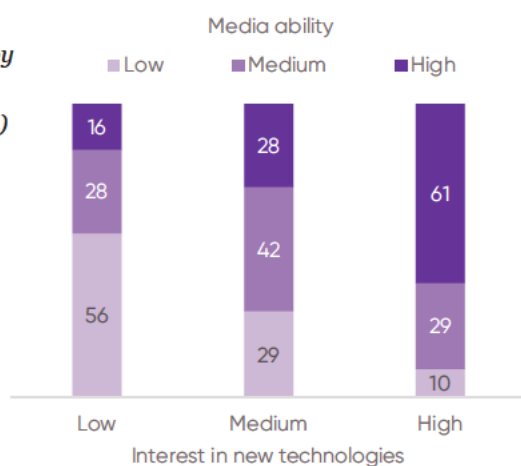
► **Figure 10.4**
Importance given to media in people's life, by interest in new technologies (%)



INTEREST IN NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND MEDIA ABILITY

Australians who are more interested in new technologies are more likely to have a higher level of media ability (see **figure 10.5**). The majority (61%) of those who have a high level of interest in new technologies also have high level of confidence in their media abilities. Those who have a low level of interest in technologies tend to also have a low level of media ability (56%).

► **Figure 10.5**
*Media ability, by
interest in new
technologies (%)*



KEY FINDINGS

The findings support the technology adoption lifecycle bell curve hypothesis where most people are placed in the middle, acting to adopt new technologies when they believe most others are doing this. However, we see more people than we expected identifying themselves as 'less interested' in new technologies than most people they know, and fewer people seeing themselves as 'more interested' than most people they know.

People who have a low interest in, or a sceptical attitude towards, new and emerging media technologies also tend to consume less digital media. They are also less likely to be confident in their media abilities.

People with a low household income, older Australians, those with less education and Indigenous Australians are all more likely to have a low interest in, or a sceptical attitude towards, new and emerging media technologies.

Australians who have a more positive attitude toward using new media technologies and platforms also tend to place greater importance on the role that media plays in their lives. It is likely that those who receive the greatest benefits from their digital media use will place greater importance on the role media plays in their lives and correspondingly will have a more positive attitude toward using new media technologies.



MEDIA USE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- » Four out of ten Australians (39%) have not undertaken any of the seven civic engagement activities in the past year.
 - » Heavy users of social media are almost four times more likely to have high levels of civic engagement (30%) when compared with non-users (8%).
 - » The more types of media people consume on a daily basis, the higher their level of civic engagement.
 - » Almost half (46%) of all people with lowest level of media ability have not undertaken any civic engagement activities in the past year.
-

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT LEVELS ARE LOW

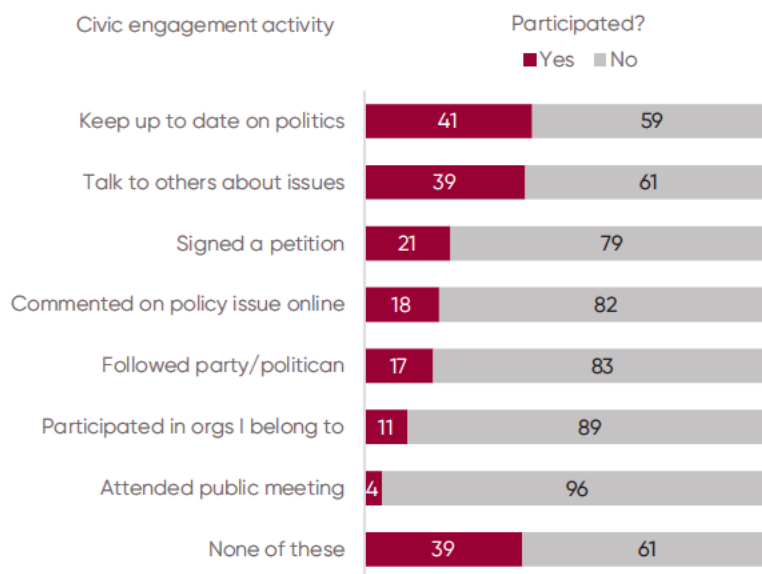
Respondents were asked whether they had participated in seven different civic engagement activities in the past 12 months. The most frequently performed civic engagement activity

among Australians was 'keeping up to date on local or national politics' (41%) and 'talking to other people about politics or community issues' (39%). Overall levels of civic participation are

low, with four out of ten Australians (39%) having not undertaken any of the seven activities in the past 12 months (see **figure 11.1**).

► **Figure 11.1**

Participation in civic engagement activities in the past 12 months (%)



AU.9 Thinking about your activities in the past twelve months have you done any of the following? (Tick all that apply).

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IS HIGHER AMONG HEAVY USERS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

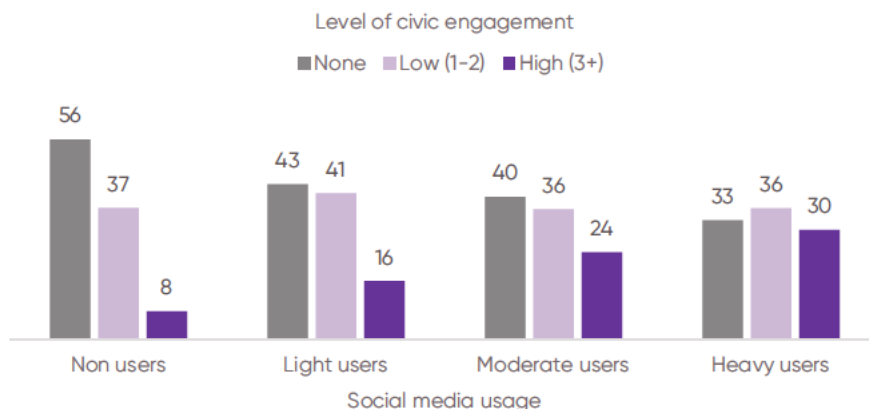
Adults who are more frequent users of social media have higher levels of civic engagement (see **figure 11.2**). Among those people who do

not use social media, only 8% had engaged in three or more forms of civic participation in the past 12 months. For heavy users of social media, by

contrast, almost one in three (30%) have the same high level of civic participation.

► **Figure 11.2**

Level of civic engagement, by social media usage

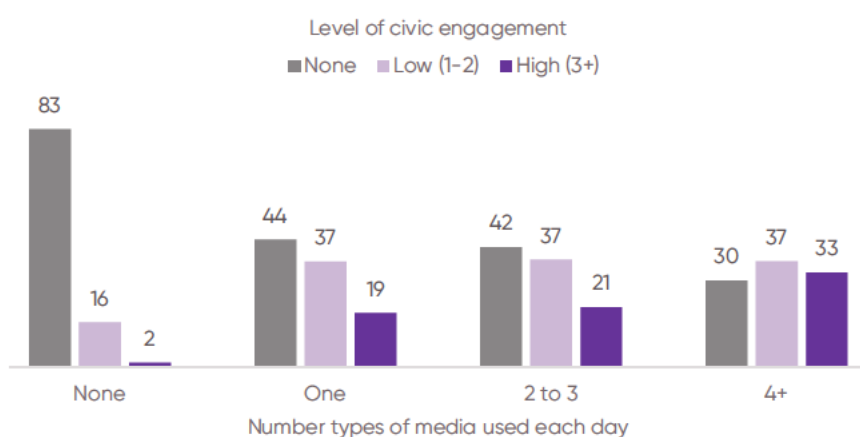


CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IS HIGHER AMONG CONSUMERS OF A DIVERSE RANGE OF MEDIA

People who engage with more types of media, on a regular basis, were also more likely to have performed a greater number of civic engagement activities (see **figure 11.3**). Among Australians who did not consume any type of media on a daily basis, more than four in five (83%) had not undertaken any civic engagement activities in

the past 12 months and just 2% had undertaken three or more activities. By contrast, people who consumed four or more different types of media each day had much higher levels of civic engagement, with one third (33%) having undertaken three or more of the listed activities.

► **Figure 11.3**
Level of civic engagement, by number of different media types consumed each day (%)

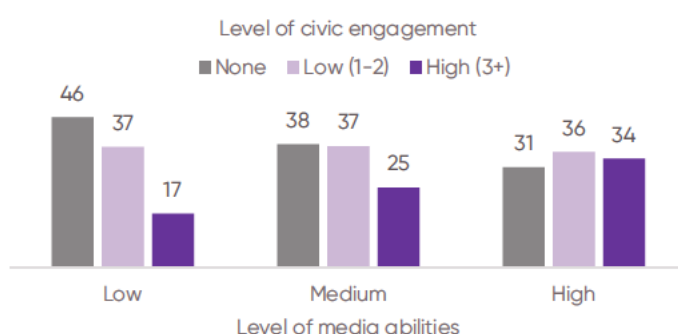


CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IS HIGHER AMONG PEOPLE WITH GREATER MEDIA LITERACY ABILITY

Almost half of adult Australians with a low level of media ability (46%), as measured by their confidence in their ability to perform a range of media activities, had not engaged in any civic engagement activity in the past 12 months (see **figure 11.4**). Those with a higher level of media ability also had a higher level of civic engagement.

While just 17% of people with low media ability have participated in three or more types of civic engagement, this figure doubles (34%) among those with a high level of media ability. The impact of having a high level of media ability on people's civic engagement remained strong even when we controlled for education, income and age.

► **Figure 11.4**
Level of civic engagement, by level of media ability (%)



KEY FINDINGS

Overall, these findings show that levels of civic participation are low, with four out of ten adult Australians (39%) having not undertaken any of the seven activities we listed in the past 12 months and 37% having engaged in just one (19%) or two (18%). This figure is indicative of a democratic disconnect, since it suggests that many Australians do not appear to be engaging with politics or civil society even in basic and fundamental ways, such as talking about issues or keeping up-to-date with politics.

We find that there is a relationship between the amount of media Australians use and their level of civic engagement. Those who use fewer types of media and who use media less frequently were also less likely to have carried out any of the civic engagement activities we listed. There is also a relationship between people's media ability (measured by their confidence in their ability to perform a number of media tasks) and their levels of civic engagement. Those with the highest level of media ability are twice as likely to have carried out one or more civic engagement activities we listed when compared to those with lowest level of media ability. In both cases, this remained true when we controlled for education, income and age.

It is important that policymakers acknowledge the relationship between media use, media literacy and civic engagement. These findings show that media use and media ability have a positive association with civic engagement, and in this way, media literacy education can also play a direct role in strengthening our democracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

There is an urgent need for a national media literacy advocacy campaign.

Three quarters (75%) of Australians have never heard of the term ‘media literacy’ or don’t know what it means. Our findings show that there is an important relationship between knowing what media literacy is and having a higher level of media ability. Of course, just knowing the term will not advance someone’s media literacy but understanding that media literacy can be enhanced and improved through formal and informal learning is likely to be an important first step toward developing media literacy. We recommend that ‘media literacy’ should be promoted as a term in public discussions, and that it should be promoted widely by our public institutions, education providers, policymakers, and the corporate sector. Some of this work has begun through organisations like the Australian Media Literacy Alliance, however, a great deal more can be done to increase people’s awareness and knowledge of this concept.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Media literacy initiatives should prioritise those Australians who are most likely to be at risk of having low media literacy.

The survey shows that Australians living in regional areas, less educated Australians, older Australians, people living with a disability, Indigenous Australians, and lower income Australians use fewer media, have less interest in engaging with new technologies, and are more likely to have lower levels of media ability. Media literacy programs for adults in the community should prioritise these groups who are, for all of these reasons, likely to have lower levels of media literacy.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Media literacy and digital inclusion advocates and facilitators should work together.

Following on from Recommendation 2, we note that our findings align with similar findings from the Australian Digital Inclusion Index^[1] that reveals similar patterns when it comes to people’s ability to access, afford and use digital technologies. Digital inclusion programs are implemented across the country by initiatives such as the nationally funded *Be Connected program*^[2], and through a range of programs in libraries and community centres for digitally and socially excluded Australians. It would make sense for media literacy to become an integral and core part of these existing digital inclusion programs. At the same time, it is important to have clarity about who existing programs reach and how effective they are in advancing media literacy. We propose a media literacy framework can help to ensure that media literacy interventions are comprehensive and go beyond issues of access and technical skills as media literacy requires that people also have advanced critical abilities. It is also important to examine the role that community organisations and public institutions — libraries, schools and museums — can play to extend the reach and impact of programs. Although there is clearly great potential for public institutions and community organisations to provide inclusive education for a range of demographics, our survey shows that they are currently only supporting the media ability of a small minority of Australians.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Prioritising media literacy education and interventions among disadvantaged Australians is essential for addressing major social issues.

Media literacy is the ability to critically engage with all forms of media. Advancing media literacy requires a sustained and multi-faceted approach. However, the survey findings highlight that Australians have very low levels of confidence with a range of tasks that are essential for full and broad media engagement. Older Australians, women, people with a lower level of formal education, people living in regional areas, people living with a disability and people from low income households were all found to be less likely to have a high level of confidence in their own media ability. The findings also show that further research needs to be funded to ensure we understand how media literacy can contribute to addressing major social issues such as citizens' digital security and privacy needs and rights, and the issue of mis- and disinformation.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Media literacy initiatives must be broad-based, addressing entertainment and information media as well as media infrastructures.

The survey findings show that Australian adults believe entertainment media provide an important opportunity for identity formation and for learning about the world. This is an important reminder that media literacy programs focussed too narrowly on news and information media are likely to be less effective. While fact-checking skills, digital privacy and security knowledge and the ability to identify misinformation are important, these alone are not enough to develop broad-based media literacy for lifelong learning. Given the value people place on entertainment media and the role that many believe it plays in their lives, media literacy must align with and connect to people's use of entertainment media. At the same time high levels of concern about misinformation, privacy, digital privacy and security demonstrate that people need to know enough about media infrastructures and the business models that underpin them to be able to critically engage with media. Given how much citizens are impacted by changes to media industries and regulation, media literacy should also support citizens to become more involved in the decision-making process about how media and media platforms are regulated.

RECOMMENDATION 6

A networked approach to media literacy education is required to be inclusive of all Australians and to be effective.

In Australia, there are media literacy and digital literacy programs available to the public but these are often one-off, piecemeal or ad-hoc. Too few Australian adults are accessing media literacy programs through informal settings like libraries and community centres. Our study shows that most people rely on online tools and their close family and friends to provide them with media literacy support when they need it. This means that people are restricted in their ability to develop their media literacy ability. We recommend that the government coordinate and build on existing efforts by connecting organisations and experts so they can work together, develop and test media literacy materials using a shared framework for adult media literacy education. This supports recommendations for a national sustained, increased and networked approach to media literacy already made to government through a number of inquiries including the *ACCC Digital Platform Inquiry* and the 2021 Senate Inquiry into *Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy*.

RECOMMENDATION 7

We need to support and promote media literacy in schools.

Our research indicates that there is widespread support amongst Australians for media literacy to be taught in schools for our future generations. Australia is fortunate to have a world-leading media literacy curriculum in the form of Media Arts in the Australian national curriculum, which provides a scope and sequence for media teaching from preschool to year ten. Media Arts is also supported by other parts of the curriculum such as English and Digital Technologies. However, research shows that only a minority of students experience media literacy in the classroom and that teachers struggle to use these curriculum documents to develop rich learning experiences for their students. More needs to be done to ensure teachers are well trained and have access to media literacy professional development. In addition, the curriculum should be presented in a way that makes it easy to interpret and implement to ensure media literacy is addressed in classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

Survey design

In July and August 2020, the research team conducted five consultation workshops with media literacy stakeholders and survey expert academics (see Acknowledgments for a full list of those we consulted).

Through these consultations, the research team was able to identify a range of different perspectives about the media practices and needs of different groups and communities, and was able to learn about gaps in understanding and knowledge these stakeholders would like to address. The survey questionnaire aimed to be inclusive and broad to capture the different needs of all population groups. However, we also acknowledge the limits of conducting an online survey to represent the views and experiences of all Australians. Some of the limits of a survey approach were minimised through applying quotas, collecting additional booster samples and by weighting the data.

Data collection

The data for this report was collected from a survey conducted between November 2 and December 6, 2020. The survey was administered by one of Australia's largest and most experienced panel-based online survey providers.

The survey sample was selected to be reflective of the Australian population by using demographic quotas set according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census data:

- » Age (18–29; 30–44; 45–59; 60+)
- » Gender^[1]
- » State and Territories
- » Education

For the main survey, four online panels were included in the recruitment with an overall response rate of 19%. Up to three reminders were sent. A total of N=3,510 completed survey responses.

We conducted additional booster surveys with people who are from culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD, N=207) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people (N=200). This was to better understand typically disadvantaged groups that are usually under-represented in online surveys.

For these two booster samples, we combined a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) method and online surveys. For the online surveys, we either invited respondents from online CALD or ATSI panels, or we recruited respondents using CATI.

For CALD groups we included eight groups (Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Filipino/Tagalog, Hindi, Punjabi, Korean and Vietnamese speakers) from the most widely spoken languages after English in Australia. In addition to the English language survey, the questionnaire was offered in Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean and Arabic.

When conducting the analysis, we applied a weight to adjust the sample to be reflective of the Australian adult population.

Unless noted otherwise, all response frequencies and percentages in this report are based on weighted survey data. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent and therefore may not add up to 100.

Limitations

We note that those who do not have access to the internet or who are not equipped with digital skills are under-represented in our survey.

In the survey, we included additional respondents who identify as ATSI or CALD to reduce the potential bias of a national online survey. We note that even though we did collect additional responses, CALD and ATSI Australians are very diverse and this diversity may not be fully represented in our booster samples.

^[1] We asked respondents if they identify as 'male', 'female' or 'gender diverse'. Only 10 respondents nominated 'gender diverse'. This number was not high enough to allow us to carry out analysis for this group.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr Simon Chambers

Simon Chambers' research background is in quantitative and qualitative cultural sociology, with a particular interest in the dynamics of cultural fields and musical taste. He has previously worked at ABC Radio National and Classic FM and is currently a consultant analyst at both APRA AMCOS and the Australian Music Centre. He has also worked on a range of Australian Research Council projects spanning Australian cultural fields, the value of music exports and the development of personalised recommendation algorithms.

Professor Michael Dezuanni

Michael Dezuanni is Program Leader for Digital Inclusion and Participation in the Digital Media Research Centre at Queensland University of Technology. He is also a Chief Investigator in the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child. Michael has been a media literacy educator in schools, a past president of Australian Teachers of Media (Queensland), a teacher educator in media literacy, and he was the expert adviser to the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) for the development of Media Arts in the Australian Curriculum.

Dr Tanya Notley

Tanya Notley has 20 years of experience working with NGOs, public institutions, universities and the United Nations in the area of communication, technology and social change. She currently leads the project, *Media Literacy in Australia*. She is also a Chief Investigator on a new national project to support the digital inclusion of low income households (led by Michael Dezuanni at QUT). Tanya collaborates with a number of organisations to address media literacy, human rights and social justice and to design communication initiatives for social impact. She is the Deputy Chair of the Australian Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA).

Professor Sora Park

Sora Park is the Associate Dean of Research at the Faculty of Arts & Design, University of Canberra. She was former Director of the News & Media Research Centre. She is the project leader of the *Digital News Report Australia*, and author of *Digital Capital* (2017, Palgrave). She has published widely on the impact of digital technology on audiences, with a special focus on digital and social exclusion and the distribution of opportunities and privileges in society. She has extensive international experience in policy research and consultancy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following people and organisations for providing us with valuable and critical feedback during our survey development consultation period.

Annabel Astbury, *Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)*

Katie Costello, *Alannah and Madeline Foundation*

Chris Cooper, *Reset Australia*

Heather Ford, *University of Technology Sydney*

Felicity Harmey, *National Film and Sound Archives (NFSA)*

Liz Jack, *National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA)*

Anne Kruger, *First Draft*

Sue McKerracher, *Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)*

Luci Pangrazio, *Centre for Research in Educational Impact, Deakin University*

Jess Perrin, *Infoxchange*

Shahnoor Shah, *Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)*

Ben Smeade, *First Nations Media Australia*

Deborah Sulway, *Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD)*

Izzy Tollhurst, *Foundation for Young Australians (FYA)*

Office of the eSafety Commissioner

Joseph Di Gregorio

Nada Rogic

Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM)

Roger Dunscombe (Victoria)

Jenn Grace (Victoria)

Aimee Gust (Queensland)

Brad Minchin (Western Australia)

Moneth Montemeyer (Queensland)

Gemma Wright (Western Australia)

Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University

Emeritus Professor Tony Bennett

Emeritus Professor Bob Hodge

Associate Professor Liam Magee

Emeritus Professor David Rowe

