UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA | NEWS AND MEDIA RESEARCH CENTRE

Google

DIGITAL NEWS REPORT: AUSTRALIA 2026

COVER IMAGE

20 December 2025 | In December of 2025 two gunmen opened fire on a crowd of people gathered at Bondi Beach to celebrate Chanukah. The attack deliberately targeted members of the Jewish community. Fifteen people were killed in the deadliest mass shooting in Australia since 1996. In the aftermath, mourners placed flowers at the Bondi Pavilion in one of numerous displays of profound grief that unfolded around the country.

IMAGE BY BIANCA DE MARCHI / AAP IMAGE

ISBN: 978-1-74088-630-7 (electronic)
978-1-74088-629-1 (print)

DOI: 10.60836/rzwf-4j74

Printed in Australia
Report Design: Ava Wang and Zita Leung

We thank Google for their generous support.

Cite as:
Park, S., McGuinness, K., Lee, J., Fulton, J., Fujita, M., Nolan, D., Fisher, C. & Nardi, G. (2026). *Digital News Report: Australia 2026.* Canberra: News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra. https://apo.org.au/node/334300.

The *Digital News Report: Australia 2026* can be downloaded from the News & Media Research Centre's website:
https://www.canberra.edu.au/uc-research/faculty-research-centres/nmrc/digital-news-report-australia

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

by **Professor the Honourable Bill Shorten**
Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Canberra

There was a time, not that long ago, when the nightly news was appointment TV. Newsreaders were held in high esteem. Long time Channel 9 nightly news anchors, Brian Henderson in Sydney, and Brian Naylor in Melbourne, even had the catch phrase 'Brian told me'. This made its way into the vernacular. If Brian told you, you could trust it to be accurate.

Back then, the idea of getting information from different sources was to watch one of the commercial news services at 6pm, followed by SBS news at 6.30pm, then ABC news at 7pm.

The *Digital News Report: Australia 2026* shows us that we have made a massive leap from those days to a news landscape that includes online news services, along with Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. We have access to news and opinion 24 hours a day on any device with internet connectivity.

We now seek news more often throughout the day, partly because of the ubiquity of social media. However, the use is uneven and fragmented. Australians consumed more news in this last year, but the way they access it has splintered even more than previously reported — a splintering by age, by gender, by education, by geography and by platform.

The report describes the habits of young people as 'unfixed and fluid' with a rising interest in news and politics. Sixty percent of 18–24-year-olds have never read a newspaper, yet 71% access news on social media regularly and 71% rely on influencers to get news that they feel is authentic.

Australians click through on social media to get more detail on news items. We click through on AI chatbots to determine a news item's veracity. The high level of distrust outlined in last year's report — about what is real and fake online — continues to grow.

This is a pivotal time for media providers. It is a pivotal time for media consumers.

The disaggregation of news sources and the emergence of new sources, such as content creators and influencers, make it increasingly hard to ensure standards that we associate with mainstream journalism are upheld. It is a salient reminder that there has never been a more important time for institutions of learning to teach their students to think critically if they are to protect themselves — and our society — from mis- and dis-information.

The reality of today's media environment makes the *Digital News Report* a crucial weapon in the armoury of policy makers and news breakers. The insights it provides into who, what, where, when and why Australians choose the sources of news they do are invaluable.

METHODOLOGY

This report is part of a long-running international survey coordinated by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, an international research centre in the comparative study of journalism based at Oxford University. The *Digital News Report* delivers comparative data on media usage in 48 countries and across 6 continents.

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

Fieldwork was conducted globally between 6 January and 20 February 2026 by YouGov plc. Online samples were around 2000 in each country and designed to be nationally representative with quotas for age, gender, and region. Education quotas were also applied to 43 countries (with the exception of Kenya, Nigeria, Morocco, Peru and Thailand).

In Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, UK and USA, we also applied additional political quotas based on vote choice in the most recent national election. The data in all markets were weighted to targets based on census/industry accepted data.

Data from India, Kenya, and Nigeria are representative of younger English speakers and not the national population, because it is not possible to reach other groups in a representative way using an online survey. The survey was fielded mostly in English in these markets and restricted to ages 18 to 55 in India, Kenya and Nigeria. Findings should not be taken to be nationally representative in these countries and we have applied caution when comparing across these countries.

In this report, we mainly compare 42 countries that have comparable samples.

Australian sample

The survey was conducted by YouGov using an online questionnaire between 9th January–6th February 2026. The sample was drawn from an online panel consisting of 652,655 adult Australians. In the Australian sample, interlocking quotas on age and gender were applied. Quotas were applied in relation to education, region, income, and 2025 federal election outcome.

Australian Sample	
Panel size	652,655
Total number of non-news users in the sample (unweighted)	105
Total sample size	2,025

The final sample is reflective of the population that has access to the internet. The data were weighted to targets based on age, gender, region, education level, and voting history to represent the total population based on Australian Bureau of Statistics census data.

2026 participating countries

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

* These countries were excluded in the global comparative analysis due to differences in sampling

In the past, we screened respondents who said they access news less than once a month. Since 2021, we have included this group in the survey. Those who access news less than once a month comprised 5% of the sample. Whenever possible, we compared the results and noted any impact of the inclusion of this group.

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

Education quota

The education question reflects the categories in the UN's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). In the past, the lower educated population was underrepresented. The categories we used in the Australian survey are summarised in the following table. Education quota was applied in all countries except for Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Peru and Thailand.

What is your highest level of education? If you are currently in full-time education, please put your highest qualification to date.	Level
• I did not complete any formal education • Early childhood education • Primary education • Lower secondary education (High School, Yr 10)	Low
• Upper secondary education (Yr 12, HSC, Baccalaureate or other Senior Secondary Certificate of Education) • Post-secondary, non-tertiary education (generally vocational/professional qualification of 1–2 years, e.g. VET (Vocational Education and Training), Certificates I–IV)	Medium
• Short-cycle tertiary education (vocational education and training, studying towards a non-academic degree, e.g. TAFE, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Associate Degree) • Bachelors or equivalent level degree • Masters or equivalent level degree • Doctoral or equivalent level degree	High

Region

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

Income quota

For the first time, a household income quota was applied in the Australian sample to better reflect national income distribution.

Political weighting

Australia was included in the 13 countries where political weighting was applied: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, UK and USA. In Australia, political weighting was based on vote choice in the 2025 federal election.

Age group

We refer to those aged 18–34 as 'U35' and those aged 35 and above as '35+' throughout the report.

Rounding

When calculating percentages, we have rounded the figures, which means in some cases the total may not add up to 100%.

AUTHORS

Sora Park is a Professor of Communication at the News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra. Her research focuses on digital media users, media markets and media policy. Her current Australian Research Council funded projects include Heartbeat of Australia and Addressing misinformation with media literacy.

Kieran McGuinness is the *Digital News Report* Postdoctoral Fellow at the News & Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra. Their work focuses on mixed methods approaches to research on news audiences, news values, journalistic practices, health communication and discourses of social change. They have also led research on diversity in news production and how multilingual audiences engage with news.

Jee Young Lee is a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra. Her research focuses on understanding diverse news audiences, including local communities and young people. She is currently leading the Australian Research Council-funded project 'News and Australian Teens: Enablers and Barriers to Digital Citizenship'.

Janet Fulton is a Research Fellow at the News & Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra. Her research interests include creativity and cultural production, creative industries and journalism studies. Janet is currently working on projects including regional news, media literacy, misinformation and embedded creative workers.

Momoko Fujita is a Senior Lecturer and a member of the News & Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra. She investigates the positive and negative influences of emerging digital media and information communication technology on consumer behaviour and wellbeing.

David Nolan is an Associate Professor at the News & Media Research Centre and Associate Dean Research in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra. His work centres on theoretical and empirical approaches to understanding change in journalism, and the role played by journalism in contemporary political and social relations, with a particular focus on the politics of race, belonging and diversity.

Caroline Fisher is an Adjunct Associate Professor at the News & Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra. Her research expertise includes trust in news, political communication, media literacy, and regional journalism.

Gianni Nardi is a Research Associate at the News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra. He works on multiple projects at the Centre as a data analyst. He is particularly interested in trust in news and the representation of health in the media. He is currently undertaking a Doctor of Medicine and Surgery (MChD) postgraduate degree at the Australian National University.

CONTRIBUTORS

Dave Earley is the Audience Editor at Guardian Australia, where he is responsible for growing the publication's reach on all platforms. He is the former Digital Editor of Quest Community Newspapers, former Engagement Editor at The Courier-Mail, and former Online Editor at Seven News. With two decades of experience at the forefront of media innovation, he is a leading voice on digital journalism, audience development and the changing media landscape.

Jim Egan is the lead author of the Reuters Institute Digital News Report. He was Chief Executive Officer of BBC World News and bbc.com between 2012–2020 before leaving to become Chief Investment Officer of Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF). Prior to taking up his position at Oxford, he was part of the executive leadership team at FT Strategies, the media consulting arm of the Financial Times in London.

Hannah Ferguson is the founder and CEO of Cheek Media Co., and the co-host of news and culture podcast, Big Small Talk. In 2025, Hannah was a Forbes 30 under 30 Honouree, and she has also written two bestselling books: *Bite Back* (2023) and *Taboo* (2024).

Will Hayward is the CEO and co-founder of The Contrarians, a podcast and video media company for the business and investing audience. The Contrarians is Australia's biggest founder led podcast. Previously, Will was CEO of Private Media. He is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Canberra and writes regularly for a variety of media trade press.

Edward Hurcombe is a Senior Lecturer and ARC DECRA Fellow in the School of Media and Communication, RMIT. Edward researches how news and journalistic practice are transforming in relation to the technologies, economies, and user cultures of digital platforms.

Jason Koutsoukis is a senior journalist and political correspondent with *The Saturday Paper*. His reporting focuses on the interplay of power, policy and political strategy in Canberra — covering issues including national security, defence procurement, transparency reform, and the dynamics within Australia's major parties. A former foreign correspondent and editor, he has contributed in-depth political analysis and investigative features that have shaped national discussion on accountability and governance.

Tim Love is the Head of Digital at Sky News Australia, a wholly-owned subsidiary of News Corp Australia which operates the country's leading online, pay-TV, FAST, podcasting and social media news brand. Tim runs the network's digital strategy and newsroom which reaches 11 million Australians monthly. Prior to joining Sky News Australia in 2016, Tim was a senior strategy manager at Foxtel's Multi-Channel Network, driving digital initiatives and brand partnerships for news and factual entertainment brands including CNN, BBC, National Geographic, Discovery and Network Ten.

Tom Mooney is the Democracy Counts Campaign Director and A/Executive Director, Democracy at McKinnon. Tom leads McKinnon's work to renew and strengthen Australia's democratic institutions. He has more than a decade's experience leading teams delivering complex policy reform and providing strategic advice to political leaders at the federal and state level. Most recently, he served as Chief of Staff to the Leader of the Government in the Senate and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon Penny Wong.

Claire Stuchbery is the Executive Director of the Local & Independent News Association (LINA), an industry association supporting digital newsrooms to produce high quality public interest journalism. She has a background in community media and communications policy and is a strong advocate for media diversity in Australia.

David Sutton is the Senior Executive Policy & Regulatory Affairs at the ABC. He has worked for the ABC for more than two decades in a range of corporate policy and strategy roles. He has a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Sydney. David is currently Vice President on the Board of the Public Media Alliance, the largest global association of public service media organisations.

Mandi Wicks has more than 35 years' experience in the media industry. She is the Director of News and Current Affairs at SBS — including SBS World News, Insight, Dateline and The Feed. Prior to this, Mandi was the Director of SBS's Audio and Language Content for almost 10 years, overseeing more than 60 language services.

Core sponsors of the international survey include Google News Initiative, BBC News, Centre d'études sur les medias, Code for Africa, Coimisiún na Meán, Commissariaat voor de Media, Edelman, Fritt Ord, Korea Press Foundation, Leibniz-Institut für Medienforschung (Hans-Bredow-Institut), Media Industry Research Foundation, NHK, Ofcom, Reuters, Roskilde University, University of Canberra, Universidad de Navarra, YouTube, Fundación Gabo.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Digital News Report: Australia 2026* shows how news consumption and trust are shaped by external factors, particularly during periods of crisis and political events. The past year was marked by global crises, the Bondi Beach shooting, and the federal election. Many Australians turned to trusted news sources to understand and make sense of these complex developments.

After several years of decline, interest in news has increased, placing Australia well above the global average. This recovery has been driven largely by audiences that typically have low news interest, including women and young people. Interest in politics has also risen among U35s, who now have higher levels of political interest than older cohorts for the first time.

These short term shifts sit within a much larger pattern of long term change. This year's analysis of Australians' evolving news habits highlights a widening generational divide, driven by increasing fragmentation in how, when, and where people access news. For younger audiences, news consumption is unfixed and fluid, largely shaped by their heavy reliance on social media. However, they continue to express high levels of concern about online misinformation and are active news avoiders, reflecting their low trust in the news they see on social media.

This year's findings underscore the growing influence of creators and influencers within the global news environment. Their role is increasingly significant in shaping how audiences discover, interpret, and engage with information.

Audiences who turn to these figures for news tend to value perspectives that either reflect or thoughtfully challenge their own views, rather than maintaining a neutral or undefined stance. This preference does not necessarily indicate a desire for partisanship; rather, it reflects a demand for authenticity. Audiences are seeking news that breaks down complex stories, offers a clear viewpoint, and demonstrates a sense of purpose.

Equally important is the style of delivery. Audiences, particularly younger demographics, are drawn to news that feels personal, relatable, and conversational. Instead of polished and formal formats, they favour storytelling that resembles the way a trusted friend might share and explain events.

Younger audiences in particular are increasingly relying on influencers as a primary source of news and information. This shift appears to be more than a temporary change in platform preference. It isn't just about consumers moving to different platforms; they are choosing more direct forms of journalism.

In an increasingly crowded digital environment, where audiences are exposed to an abundance of news and information, people gravitate toward trusted sources. When audiences judge news coverage to be of poor quality, levels of distrust are markedly higher. Conversely, trust improves when news organisations are seen to deliver accurate, reliable, and well-produced reporting. Higher perceived quality strengthens trust, and greater trust, in turn, is associated with more active news consumption. This basic principle is critical to the sustainability and relevance of news organisations in an increasingly complex and uncertain media landscape.

Australians are consuming more news

News consumption in Australia increased by 3 percentage points in 2026, with the proportion of Australians accessing news more than once a day reaching 56%. This is largely driven by the increased news use among U35s and women, who are typically lighter news consumers. This is partly related to the growth of social media as a source of news. Seventy-one percent (+9) of 18–24-year-olds, and 57% (+7) of women access news on social media on a weekly basis.

Social media is now the second most used news source (56%, +9) in Australia behind TV (57%). It has also become the main pathway (32%) to online news, overtaking direct access to news websites (31%) for the first time. This means that control over the visibility of news to audiences is increasingly mediated by digital platforms, and publishers are relying on the click-through rates.

While TV remains the most widely used main source of news, its dominance is eroding over time. People are migrating online to watch news videos (73%, +6), and 29% are using video apps, such as YouTube, on their smart TVs. This is more than half (57%) of smart TV news users.

Video platforms are driving increased engagement with news on social media

Social media continues to play a growing and complex role in how Australians access and interact with news. In 2026, video first platforms and instant messaging apps are driving the biggest growth.

Facebook remains the most widely used social media platform for news, despite Meta's algorithmic strategy to deprioritise news. Older respondents have increased their consumption of news on Facebook, while younger audiences increasingly prefer video-based platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. Nearly half of Australians aged 18–24 use TikTok for news, making it the top platform among this group.

Facebook (39%) and YouTube (34%) now outperform news websites and apps (26%) to watch news videos. Short form video dominates across platforms, with most watching news videos under two minutes (Facebook, 71%; Instagram, 71%). However, YouTube stands out as the main platform for longer news videos (40%), especially among highly educated and politically engaged audiences. This preference for news videos reflects the widespread use of smart TVs for news (52%).

Changing news habits

Large proportions of Australians report having stopped using traditional news media over their lifetimes, most notably newspapers and radio. Two in five (40%) Australians say they previously read newspapers regularly but no longer do so, far exceeding the proportion who have stopped using television (26%) or online news (15%). There is a big generational divide; many 18–24-year-olds have never used newspapers (60%), radio (53%) or TV (25%) as a news source. Fewer people report having stopped using online news (15%), suggesting its potential to grow.

Australians are more loyal towards news brands than consumers in other countries. We are among the most loyal in the world in using the same brands every day. Around one third (34%) of Australians say they use the same news brands daily and brand loyalty is higher among older audiences, regional consumers, and those with low education. However, younger people are less attached to specific brands and more likely to use a wide range of sources. About half of U35s (18–24, 43%; 25–34, 50%) access more than seven news brands on a weekly basis. This includes news brands people access offline, online and on social media.

Overall, younger Australians are more flexible with their news consumption habits, and older generations are more fixed in their routines. While most Australians consistently use the same devices to access news, fewer maintain regular patterns in when, where, and how often they do it or what they're looking at. Social media users are especially likely to access news irregularly, with high exposure to incidental news. Younger audiences are the least consistent across time, place, devices and brands, suggesting a shift away from habitual news routines.

Creators and influencers are becoming a significant part of Australia's news ecosystem

Creators and influencers are becoming an important part of Australia's news landscape. Four in ten Australian news consumers (43%) access news from individual creators or influencers, a rate similar to the global average (46%). This signals a shift in how audiences discover and engage with news, especially among U35s, almost three-quarters get news from influencers (18–24, 70%; 25–34, 72%).

News from creators and influencers appears to complement rather than replace mainstream news. More than half of users say these creators meet only some of their news needs, with most still relying on other sources of news. However, many young people rely on influencers for news. More than half of U35s (18–24s, 52%; 25–34s, 53%) say that creators and influencers meet all or most of their news needs. Those who do prefer news from influencers say it is more entertaining (59%), relatable (55%), and easy to understand (56%) than mainstream news.

Trust in news encountered on social media is related to use of influencers for news. Audiences who distrust mainstream news and curate news content on social platforms are more likely to seek news from influencers for their perceived authenticity and relatability.

The influencer news market is highly fragmented. Consumers name hundreds of different individuals, journalists, and personalities, with low concentration even among top influencers. While this fragmentation may offer a diverse range of perspectives to audiences, it also produces a wide variation in quality and a lack of consistent industry standards, which may further erode trust in the wider news environment. Influencers are unlikely to replace mainstream news in the near future, but audiences are signalling a clear desire for news that feels more accessible, engaging and relevant.

Interaction with news is growing

Australians are increasingly likely to talk about news (40%, +6), read comments on social media (39%, +8), and engage with news content on social media (20%, +4) or via an instant messenger (19%, +6). These interaction behaviours have grown steadily since 2024, particularly among younger people. However, clear gender gaps persist. Men are more visible contributors through commenting and sharing, while women prefer to just read others' comments.

Generative AI for news

Generative AI chatbots are emerging as an important part of the Australian news ecosystem. In 2026, nearly one in ten Australians (9%) report using tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, or Perplexity to get their news, which is broadly in line with the global average (9%). Usage is unevenly distributed, with significantly higher adoption among men, younger people, those with higher education and income, and people who live in the city. The use of AI to access news is much higher among people who already pay for online news and have strong interest in news and politics. Trust also plays a central role in AI news use. People who trust news generally, especially from AI chatbots, are much more likely to use these tools. Among people who use AI chatbots for news, they most often used them to ask follow-up questions (49%), summarise (45%), and get the latest news (44%). AI users also turned to chatbots to make news easier to understand and to help explain complex issues. The top reasons for using AI chatbots for news is to collate stories from different news sources (50%) and to ask follow-up questions to get more in-depth explanation (43%).

The intermediary role of digital platforms

We asked users how often they click through to original content on digital platforms. People report higher click-through rates to news sources when using search engines (45%), and lower click-throughs when using AI chatbots (38%), or social and video networks (37%). AI use is still in its early stages with highly engaged users, and this pattern may change over time if it becomes more mainstream. Motivations for clicking through to original news sources also differ by platform. Across search engines and social media, the primary reason to click is to obtain more detailed information. On AI platforms, people want to verify the accuracy of the information.

Public service media are gaining the support of younger audiences

Around half (49%) of Australians believe public service media (PSM) have a positive effect on life in Australia, well above the global average of 36%. Younger adults, particularly those aged 25–34 (68%) are far more positive about PSM than those aged 55–64 (34%) and 65+ (38%). To Australians, ensuring everyone has access to important national and local news is the most positive aspect of PSM. While older Australians' use of PSM has declined since 2022, engagement among younger audiences has grown significantly from 43% in 2022 to 54% in 2026 among 18–24s.

Australians are evenly split on whether the news media are doing a good or bad job

Respondents are more likely to think that news organisations are doing a good job reporting on inflation and cost of living (36%) than other topics. On immigration only 23% say the news media are doing a good job. Perceptions of news quality vary sharply across demographics. Younger audiences, men, those with higher education, and heavy news consumers are consistently more positive. In contrast, regional Australians are less satisfied than those in major cities, highlighting perceived gaps in local relevance and representation. Payment status is also strongly linked to perceptions of quality. People who pay for online news are more likely to rate coverage as high quality across all topics.

Most Australians prefer news without a strong point of view

Almost half (49%) of Australians prefer news from sources that do not take a particular point of view. Only one in five (17%) favour news that aligns with their own viewpoint, and the same number seek news from sources that challenge their views. Those aged 25–34 (30%), are more likely to value news that reflects their own viewpoints.

Paying for news is stable

The proportion of Australians paying for online news remains steady (23%). Australia continues to be one of the strongest global markets for paid digital news, beaten only by a small number of Nordic countries. Globally, however, willingness to pay for online news appears to have plateaued amid the persistent cost of living crisis.

Among those who do pay, Australia stands out with 35% of people paying for digital-only news organisations, which is well above the global average of 23%. This payment pattern is driven by U35s, who are the most active in paying for digital-only news subscriptions (47%).

Ongoing digital subscriptions (14%) continue to grow and have doubled since 2019 (7%). This suggests that while fewer new people are entering the paid news market, those who do pay are settling into regular news subscription habits.

Younger and more highly educated audiences are driving the growth in news payment. Payment has risen most sharply among those under 35s with higher education, widening the gap between younger and older Australians.

There are key reasons Australians pay for news: to access unique content (46%) and avoid advertising (39%), followed closely by paying for news they use to pass the time (38%). Many also cite supporting journalism as a social good or having aligned values with a particular news organisation as important reasons. These social good motivations are especially pronounced among younger audiences, with 30% of U35s paying to ensure news remains freely available to others compared to only 15% among those aged 35+.

Australians who use news influencers or creators as a source of news are also substantially more likely to pay for news overall (38%). These users tend to be more active and fluid in their news habits, spreading their payments across a wider range of outlets, including digital only publications, aggregators, and individual journalists.

Trust remains low, along with persistently high concern about misinformation

Australians' trust in news is unchanged in 2026 (43%), while trust in my news has risen to 54% (+5), widening the gap in trust between news people choose to consume and the broader news environment. In contrast, trust in news on social media (21%) and from AI chatbots (19%) is very low.

Strikingly, there was an increase in news trust among U35s since 2024, who now have higher trust in both news generally (U35, 50% vs. 35+, 40%) and *my news* (U35, 60% vs. 35+, 51%) than older Australians — reversing a long-standing age gap.

Trust is highest in public service media news brands, with perceived quality of journalism one of the strongest predictors of trust. Australians who believe news organisations are doing a good job reporting on major issues — such as climate change or cost of living — are much more likely to say they trust the news. Belief in the positive social role of PSM is also strongly associated with higher trust.

People who distrust news are much more likely to avoid it and to express strong concern about misinformation. Overall, concern about what is real or fake online continues to grow (77%, +3) — the highest level of concern globally — which reflects the rising use of social platforms and AI chatbots for news.

News avoidance remains widespread

Despite rising interest in news, more than two thirds (68%) of Australians continue to avoid it. Avoidance is especially high among women (71%), 18–24-year-olds (83%), and those who distrust news (80%). Avoidance has increased sharply among the youngest cohort, even though their news consumption and interest have grown, indicating a pattern of intermittent engagement. High concern about misinformation and distrust in news, particularly on social media, are strongly associated with higher levels of avoidance.

News organisations face the challenge of engaging audiences who are simultaneously curious and cautious, highly connected but resistant to fixed routines or brand loyalty. Predicting future news behaviours — especially among younger cohorts — will become increasingly difficult as habits continue to adapt to new platforms, formats and emerging technologies such as generative AI.

This year's findings confirm that young people are not disengaged from news; rather, they are gravitating toward formats and voices they perceive as more entertaining, relatable, authentic, and easier to understand than traditional news brands.

The challenge for news organisations is to be able to appeal to new audiences through different, entertaining and engaging storytelling without compromising on the quality and credibility of their content.

Quality journalism underpins trust, and trust is the foundation of audience engagement, confirming the importance of high-quality journalism to our civic infrastructure and democracy.

KEY FINDINGS

Chapter 1: Value of journalism to audiences

- More than one-third (36%) of news consumers think the news media are doing a good job covering inflation and the cost of living.
- Three-quarters (77%) believe media owners influence news coverage.
- Almost one-third (30%) of 25–34-year-olds prefer news that shares their point of view compared to only 12% of 55–64s.
- Half (49%) of news consumers say public service media play a positive role in Australian life.
- Thirty-nine percent of right-wing consumers say that public service media have a negative effect on society.

Chapter 2: Changing news habits

- 60% of 18–24-year-olds have never read a printed newspaper.
- 18–24-year-olds' interest in news has risen sharply since 2024 (47%, +12).
- U35s are more interested in politics than those aged 35+.
- Younger people's news habits are fluid in relation to when, where, why, what and how they consume it.
- News avoidance remains high among Australians (68%).

Chapter 3: Generative AI, digital platforms & news

- Nearly one in ten Australians now use generative AI chatbots for news (9%, +3).
- Half (49%) of AI chatbot news consumers turn to them to follow up on news stories.
- AI news users value the chatbots' ability to aggregate, explain, and simplify news.
- Social media (37%) and AI chatbots (38%) have lower rates of click-through to news sources compared to search engines (45%).
- Users tend to click through search engines, social media and AI chatbots to get more details, but also click through AI chatbots to verify the news.

Chapter 4: News creators and influencers

- Forty-three percent of Australian news consumers get news from creators and influencers.
- News creators and influencers meet the needs of right-wing consumers (52%) more than left-wing (37%).
- News from creators and influencers is seen as more entertaining (59%), relatable (55%) and easier to understand (56%) than traditional news media.
- People who distrust mainstream news tend to view influencers as more trustworthy and authentic than traditional media.
- Right-wing news influencer users are more likely to see them as knowledgeable (54%) and trustworthy (47%) than left-wing (35%; 24%).

Chapter 5: News access

- Heavy news consumption has risen to 56% (+3), with strong growth among 18–24s (49%, +13 from 2023).
- Social media (56%, +9) is now the second most used general source of news, just behind TV (57%) and ahead of online news (52%, +5).
- Smart TV is used by more than half (52%) of Australian to access news.
- Social media (32%, +8) has overtaken direct access (31%, +1) as the main pathway to online news.
- More than one-third (35%, +6) of news consumers access seven or more news brands each week.

Chapter 6: Social media, news video & podcasting

- Almost half (48%, +12) of 18–24s use TikTok for news.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%, +6) watch news videos online each week.
- Podcast use is rising across the political spectrum, with increases among right-leaning (16%, +7) and left-leaning audiences (18%, +4).
- Interaction with news is growing with 40% talking about it with others and 39% reading comments on social media.
- Men and younger people are increasingly sharing news on social media.

Chapter 7: Trust and misinformation

- Trust in *my news* rose among under 35s (60%, +6), and traditional brands experienced a trust bump.
- Audiences trust *my news* (54%, +5) more than twice as much as news on social media (21%) or from AI chatbots (19%).
- High quality coverage of major issues is linked to higher trust in news.
- More than three quarters (77%, +3) are concerned about what is real or fake on the internet.
- Half of news consumers distrust news on social media (51%) and AI chatbots (49%).

Chapter 8: Paying for news

- Payment for online news has remained stable (23%, +1).
- Young people are increasingly paying for news (41% of 25–34, +7).
- Australia has the highest proportion of people paying for digital-only news brands (35%) globally.
- The top reasons for paying for news are to get exclusive content (46%) and an ad-free experience (39%).
- U35s (30%) are twice as likely than 35+ (15%) to pay for news to make sure news content is available free of charge to others.

1 VALUE OF JOURNALISM TO AUDIENCES

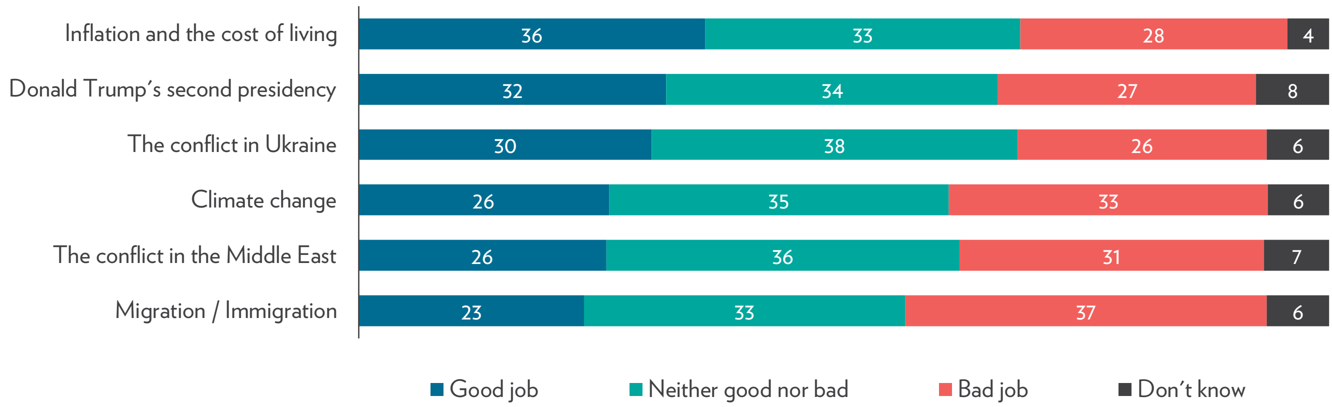
- More than one-third (36%) of news consumers think the news media are doing a good job in covering inflation and cost of living.
- Three-quarters (77%) believe media owners influence news coverage.
- Almost one-third (30%) of 25–34-year-olds prefer news that shares their point of view compared to only 12% of 55–64s.
- Half (49%) of news consumers say public service media has a positive effect on life in Australia.
- Thirty-nine percent of right-wing consumers say that public service media has a negative effect on society.

QUALITY OF NEWS

Australians are evenly split on whether the news media are doing a good or a bad job

This year, we asked respondents whether they think the news media are doing a good job or a bad job of covering news topics. Respondents are more likely to think that news organisations are doing a good job reporting on inflation and cost of living (36%) than any other topics, including Trump's second presidency (32%), the conflict in Ukraine (30%), climate change (26%), conflict in the Middle East (26%), and migration (23%). Migration and immigration were by far the least well covered, with 37% saying Australian media are doing a bad job of covering these topics. Many respondents expressed neutral views, with a slightly higher proportion saying neither to news about global conflicts (see **figure 1.1**).

Figure 1.1: Quality of reporting on major issues (%)

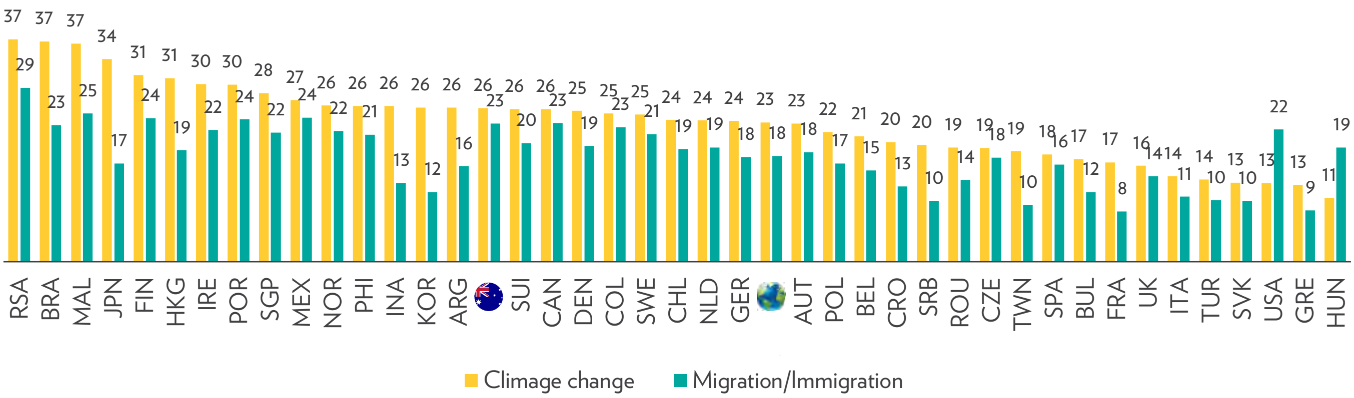


[Q_BigStories] Thinking about the news media in your country, do you think they generally do a good job or a bad job of covering each of the following? [Base *n* = 2,025]

Australian participants are above the global average (23%; 18%) in saying news organisations did a good job of reporting on climate change (26%) and immigration (23%). A higher proportion of respondents in South Africa (37%), Brazil (37%) and Malaysia (37%) think the news media is doing a good job reporting on climate change. On this topic audiences are less satisfied in Slovakia (13%), the United States (13%), Greece (13%) and Hungary (11%).

For migration/immigration, about one-third of South African audiences (29%) believe their news media is doing a good job while only 9% of Greek audiences think so. Respondents in the United States are less likely to feel their news media is doing a good job reporting on climate change (13%). However, they are much more likely to view coverage of migration positively (22%), which is above the global average (18%) (see **figure 1.2**).

Figure 1.2: Quality of reporting on climate change and migration/immigration by country (%)



[Base *n* = 85,385]

Under 35s are more likely to say that the news media are doing a good job

Men, under 35s, and those with high education are more likely to say that the quality of news reporting on major issues is good. Almost half (47%) of under 35s are happy with the quality of reporting on inflation and cost of living, and their positive views on climate change reporting is more than double of those who are 35+ (41% vs. 20%).

Across all the major issues, those with a high education are more likely to agree that the news media is doing a good job with big gaps between low and high education in relation to climate change (19 pp), inflation and the cost of living (18pp), and the war in Ukraine (14pp) (see **figures 1.3**, **1.4** and **1.5**).

Figure 1.3: Quality of reporting on major issues by gender (% good job)

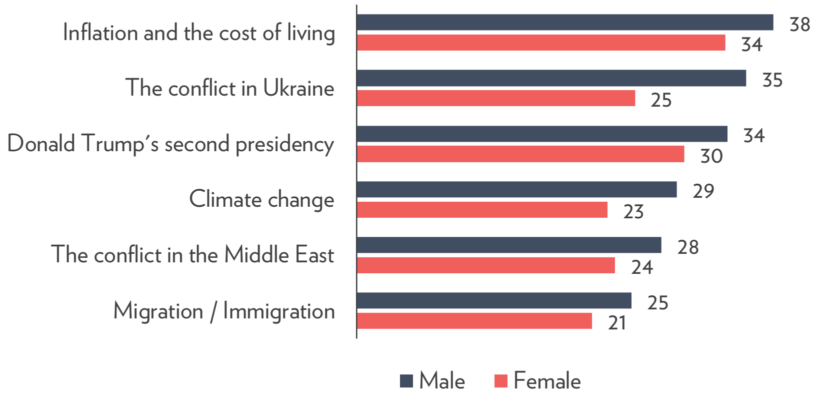


Figure 1.4: Quality of reporting on major issues by age (% good job)

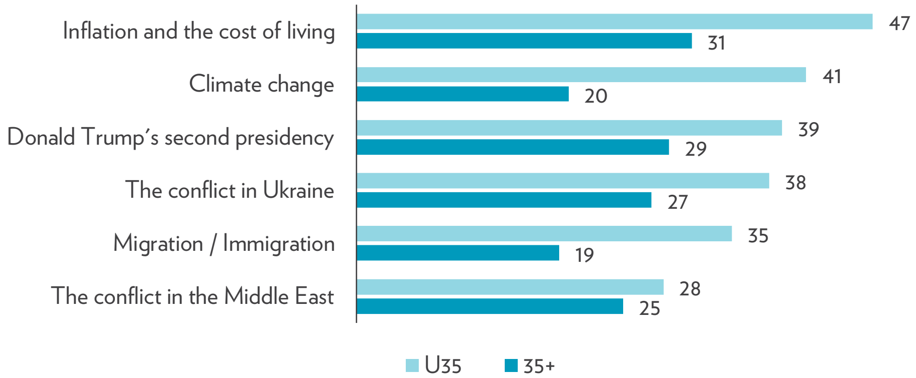
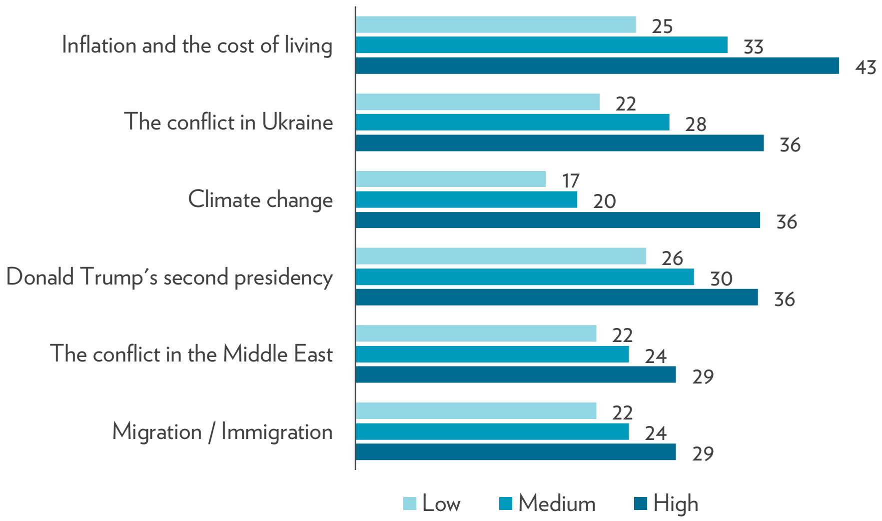


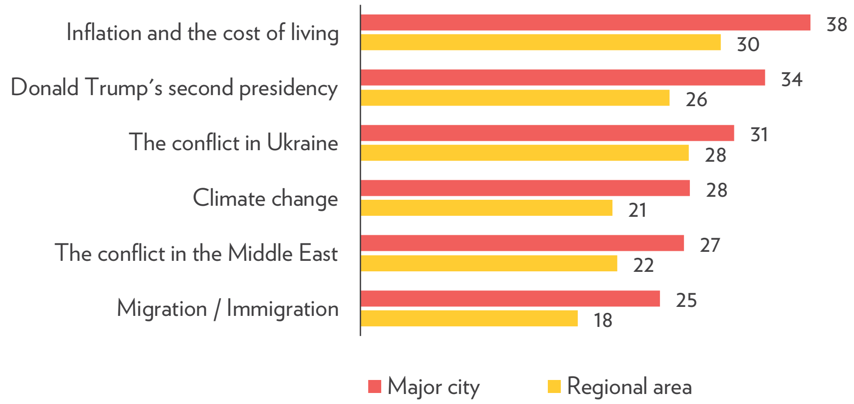
Figure 1.5: Quality of reporting on major issues by education (% good job)



Regional consumers are less satisfied with news coverage

Regional consumers are less likely to say the quality of news reporting on major issues is good. There is an eight percentage point difference between city and regional consumers in the reporting on inflation and cost of living as well as Trump's second presidency (see **figure 1.6**).

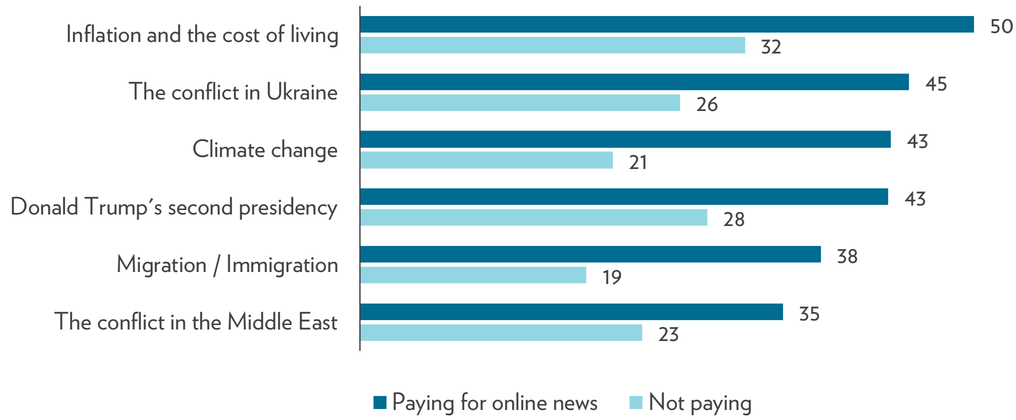
Figure 1.6: Quality of reporting on major issues by region (% good job)



Those who pay for news are satisfied with the quality of news reporting

Those who pay to access online news are across the board more likely to say that news media do a good job reporting on major issues, with half (50%) stating that inflation and the cost of living is covered adequately. There is a marked difference with those who don't pay for news, particularly in the reporting of climate change (43% vs. 21%), the conflict in Ukraine (45% vs. 26%), and inflation and the cost of living (50% vs. 32%) (see **figure 1.7**).

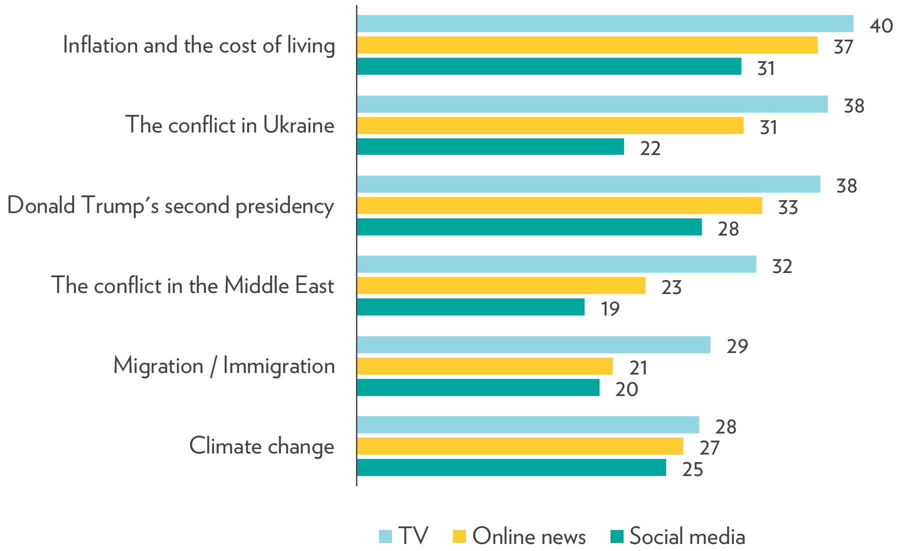
Figure 1.7: Quality of reporting on major issues by paying for online news (% good job)



TV news consumers are most likely to say the news media are doing a good job

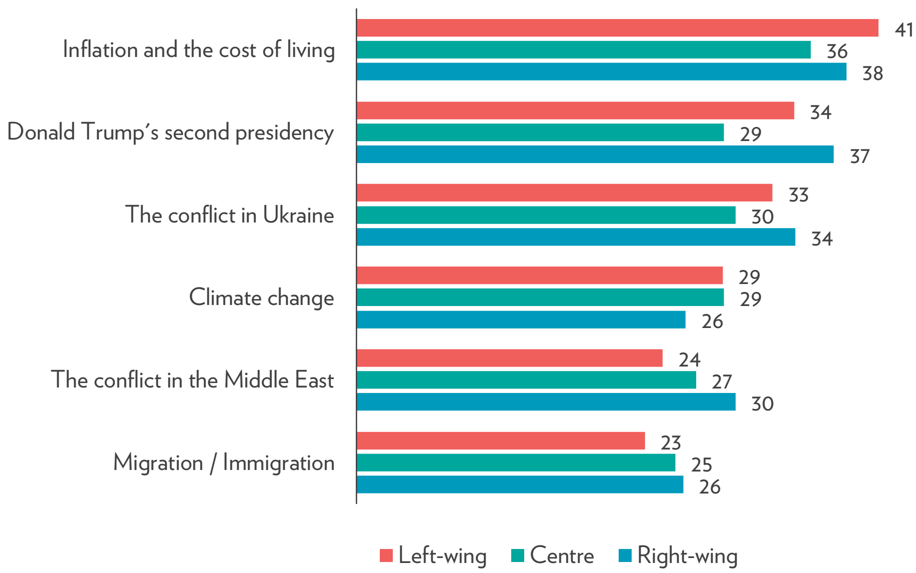
Those who say their main source of news is TV are the most likely to say news media are doing a good job of covering major topics. In contrast, those who mainly access news on social media are much less likely to say news media are doing a good job (see **figure 1.8**).

Figure 1.8: Quality of reporting on major issues by main source of news (% good job)



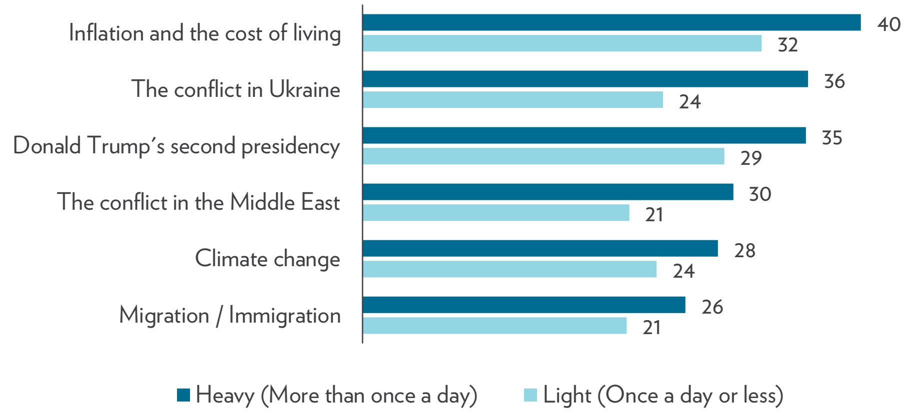
Right-wing consumers are more likely to say the news media are doing a good job of covering Trump's second presidency (37%), and the conflict in the Middle East (30%) compared to left-wing (34%, 24%). On the other hand, left-wing consumers think the news media do a good job reporting on inflation/cost of living (41%) and climate change (29%) compared to right-wing (38%, 26%) (see **figure 1.9**).

Figure 1.9: Quality of reporting on major issues by main source of news (% good job)



Heavy news consumers are generally more satisfied with the quality of news reporting. Forty percent of heavy news consumers say the news media do a good job of covering inflation and cost of living and 36% think the conflict in Ukraine is well covered. The biggest gap in perception of reporting quality between heavy and light news consumers is in relation to the conflict in Ukraine (12pp) (see **figure 1.10**).

Figure 1.10: Quality of reporting on major issues by news access (% good job)

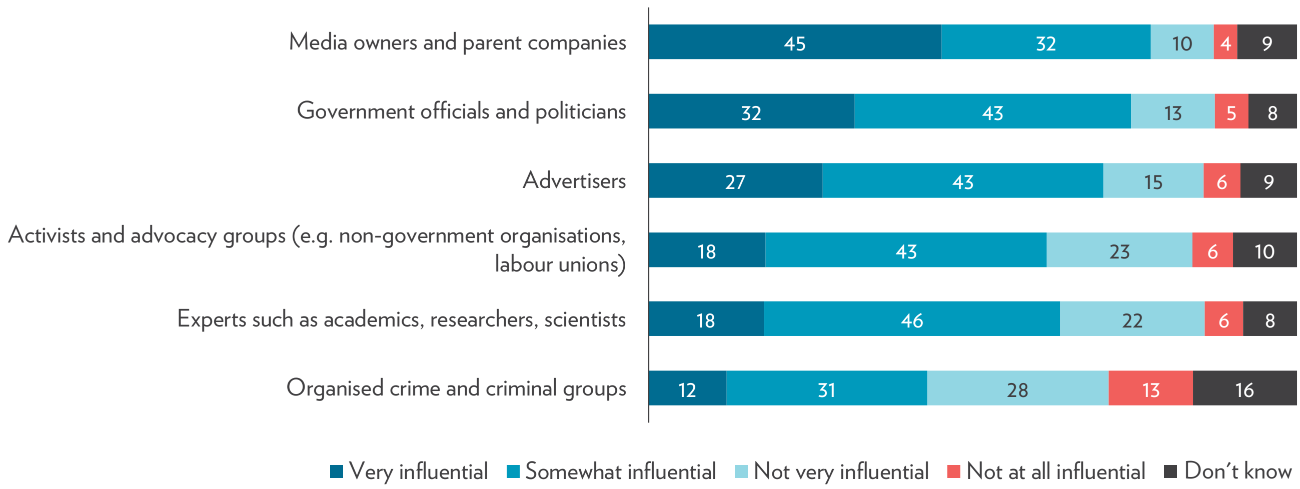


INFLUENCES ON NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE

Three quarters believe media owners influence the news coverage

Seventy-seven percent of respondents believe that media owners and parent companies are very or somewhat influential on news coverage. A similar proportion think government officials and politicians (75%) have an influence and a slightly smaller number of people say advertisers (70%) have influence, indicating that the majority of news consumers believe that news media are influenced by external factors. Respondents also believe there is influence from activists (61%), experts (64%) and criminals (43%), but to a lesser degree (see **figure 1.11**).

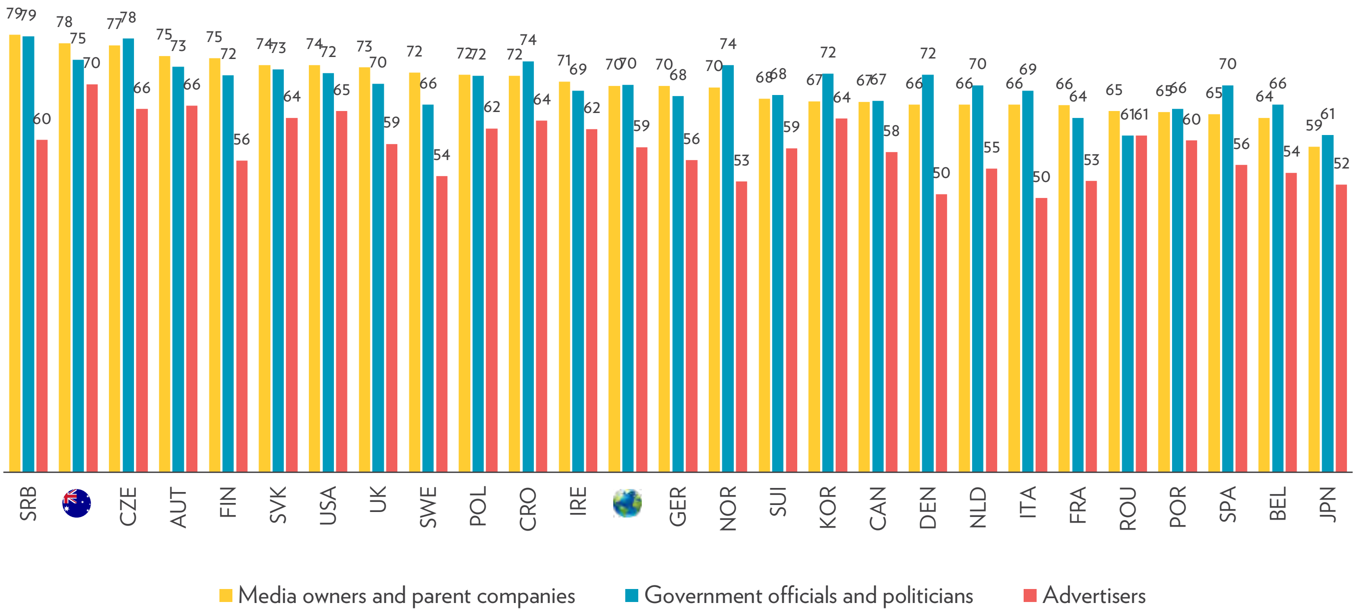
Figure 1.11: Influences on news media coverage (%)



[Q_undue] Thinking about the news media in your country... how influential, or not, do you think each of the following is on news coverage? [Base *n* = 2,025]

Australians believe media owners and parent companies, government officials and politicians, and advertisers have more influence on the way news is reported than the global average (see **figure 1.12**).

Figure 1.12: Influences on news media coverage by country (% very/somewhat influential)

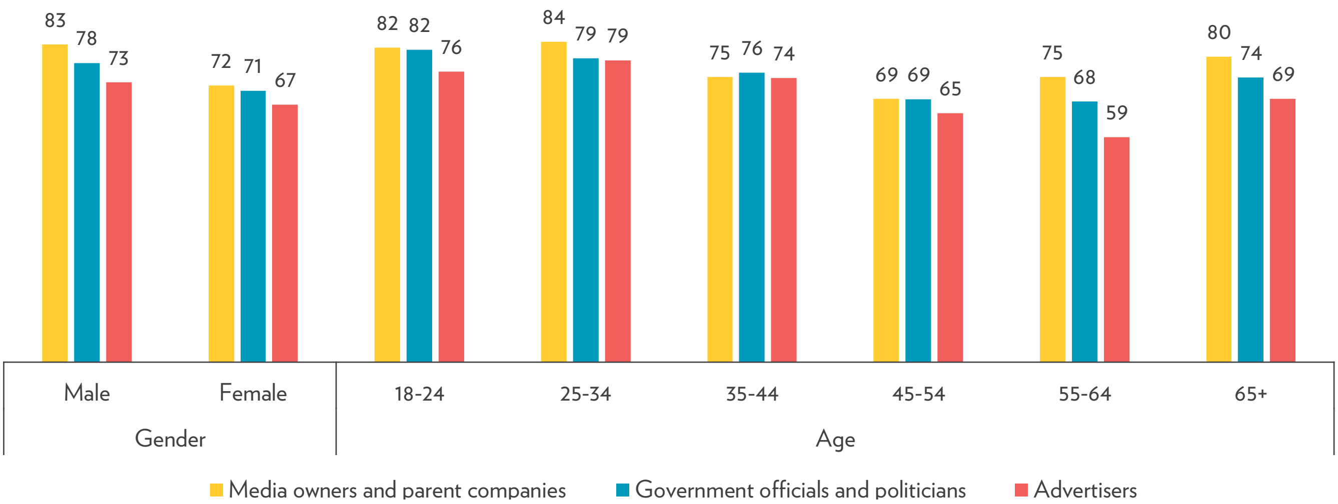


[Base *n* = 52,857]

U35 and 65+ are more likely to say media owners have a strong influence

Across all demographics, media owners and parent companies are considered the most influential on news coverage. Men (83%) are much more likely than women (72%) to say media owners have an influence. The youngest and oldest age cohorts tend to think media owners have an influence, whereas those aged 45–54s are less likely to think so (see **figure 1.13**).

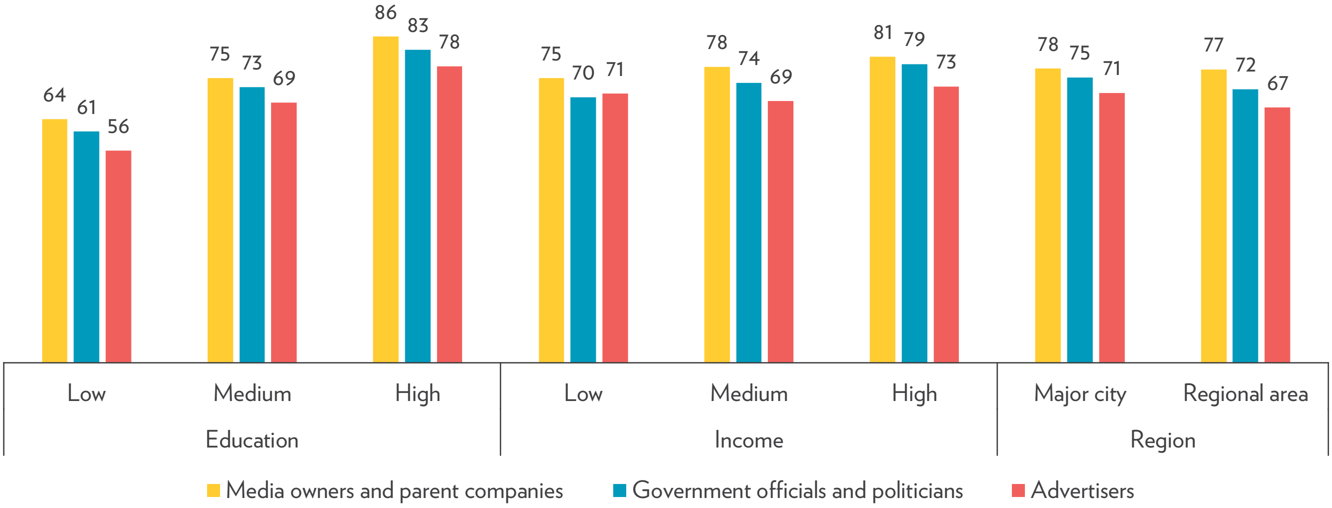
Figure 1.13: Influences on news media coverage by gender and age (% very/somewhat influential)



Education plays a major role in shaping how people perceive who or what influences the way news is reported. Those with high levels of education are much more likely to agree that media owners and parent companies (86%), government officials and politicians (83%), and advertisers (78%) have an influence on news coverage compared to those with low level of education (64%, 61%, 56%).

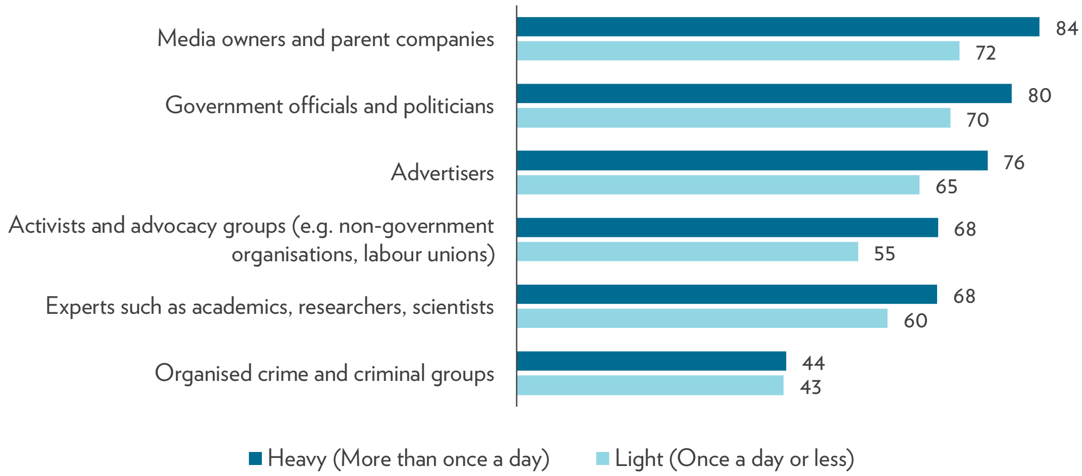
There is little difference in the perception between city and regional consumers in the influence of media owners on news coverage. However, city dwellers are more likely to think government and advertisers have an influence compared to regional consumers (see **figure 1.14**).

Figure 1.14: Influences on news media coverage by education, income and region (% very/somewhat influential)



Heavy news consumers are generally more likely to say the external factors have an influence on news coverage compared to light news consumers although the difference is minimal in organised crime and criminal groups (see **figure 1.15**).

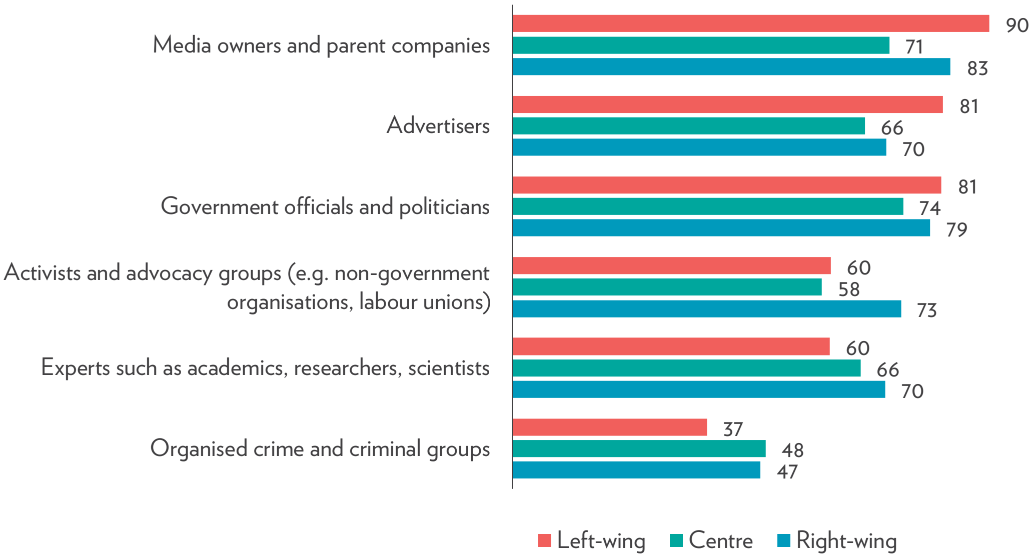
Figure 1.15: Influences on news media coverage by news access (% very/somewhat influential)



Left-wing audiences point to media owners and parent companies as having the most influence on news coverage

Those who have a left-wing political leaning believe that media owners and parent companies influence news coverage (90%) compared to right-wing (83%) and centrist (71%) participants. This thinking is reversed when considering activists and advocacy groups, 73% right-wing versus 58% centre and 60% left-wing participants, as well as experts (right 70%; left 60%; centre 66%). Note that 'labour unions' was included as one of the examples in the activists and advocacy groups, and including unions may have influenced the answeres of the right-leaning respondents (see **figure 1.16**).

Figure 1.16: Influences on news media coverage by political orientation (% very/somewhat influential)



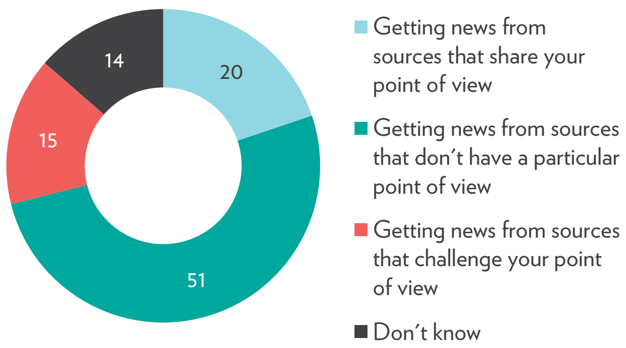
POINT OF VIEW IN NEWS

Half of news consumers prefer news that is neutral

When asked about preferences for the way news is reported, the top preference among consumers was news that doesn't have a point of view (51%), followed by sources that share their point of view (20%). Fewer people (15%) prefer news that challenges their viewpoint. Fourteen percent of respondents did not have a view on this matter (see **figure 1.17**).

35%
prefer news to
have a viewpoint

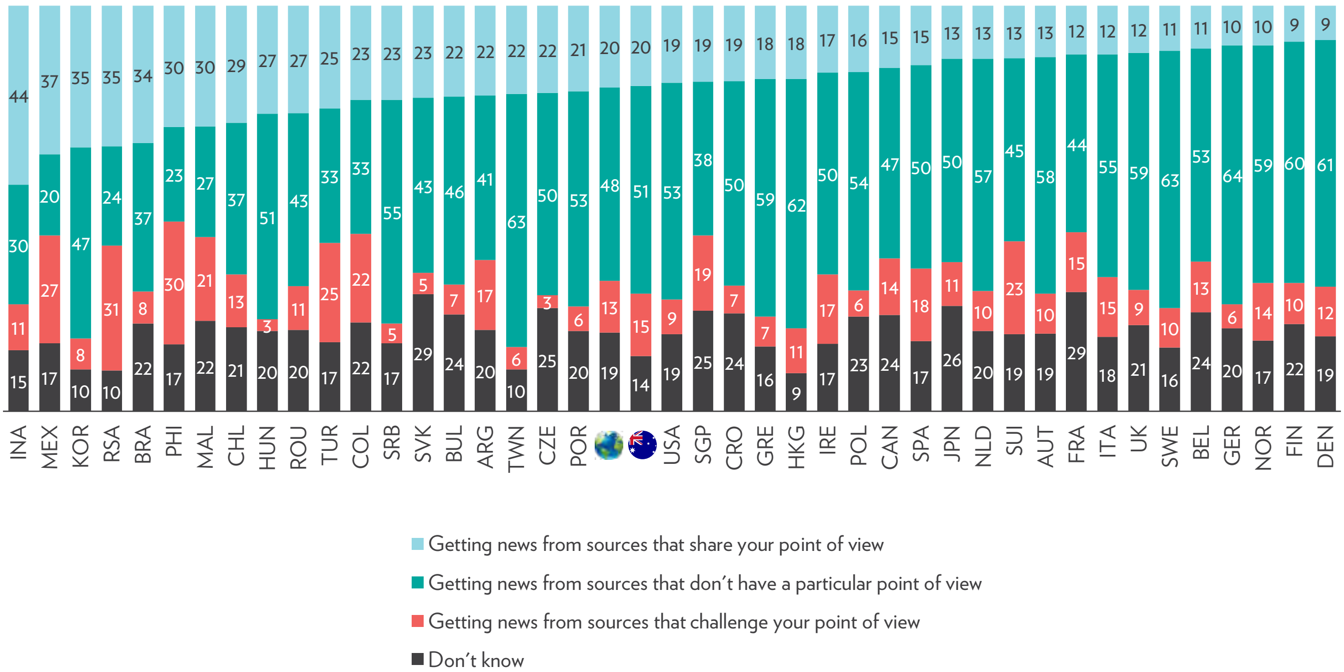
Figure 1.17: Preference for point of view in news (%)



[Q5c_2013] Thinking about the different kinds of news available to you, do you prefer... [Base *n* = 2,025]

Australians are on par with the global average; globally, 48% prefer neutral news, 20% prefer news that shares their point of view and 13% prefer news that challenges their viewpoint. Globally, Indonesia (44%), Mexico (37%), Korea (35%) and South Africa (35%) have the highest proportion of respondents saying they prefer news that shares their point of view (see **figure 1.18**).

Figure 1.18: Preference for point of view in news by country (%)

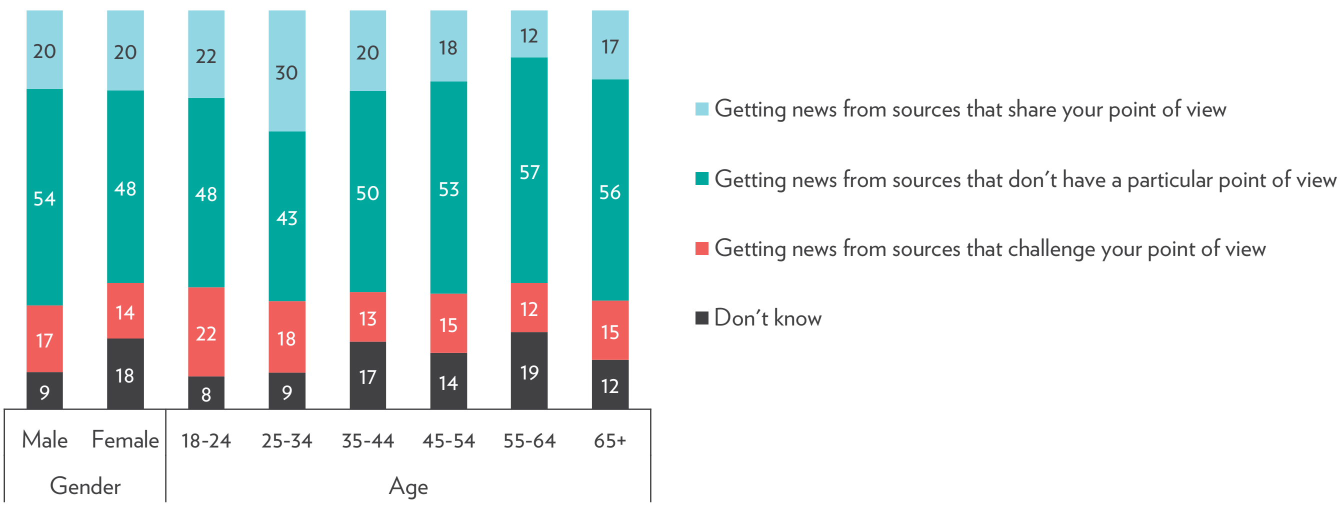


[Base *n* = 85,385]

One-third of 25–34-year-olds prefer news that shares their point of view

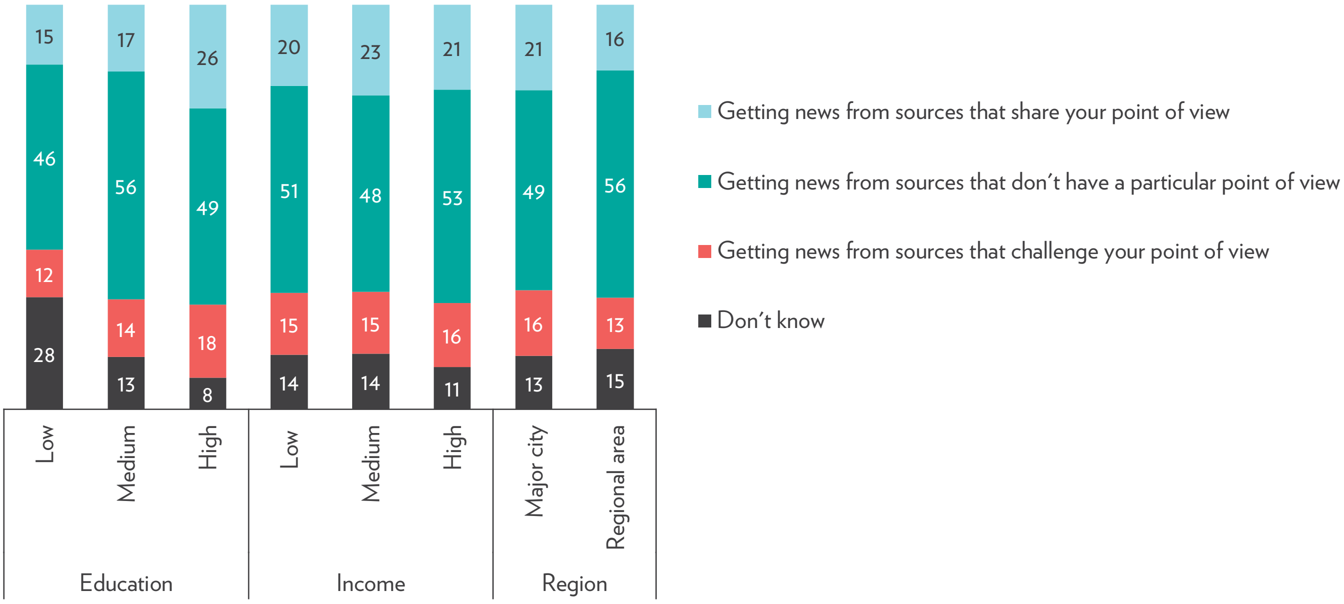
Those 55+ (55–64 57%; 65+ 56%) and men (54%) prefer news sources that have a neutral perspective. Forty-eight percent of women hold a similar view. The highest percentage of respondents who prefer news sources that align with their point of view are participants aged 25–34, with almost one in three (30%) choosing this option (see **figure 1.19**).

Figure 1.19: Preference for point of view in news by gender and age (%)



Respondents with high education prefer news that agrees with their perspective (26%) compared to those with low education (15%). Almost one in three (28%) of those with low education say they don't know what type of news they prefer. Those with a medium level education (56%), with a high income (53%) and live in a regional area (56%) prefer their news sources to be neutral (see **figure 1.20**).

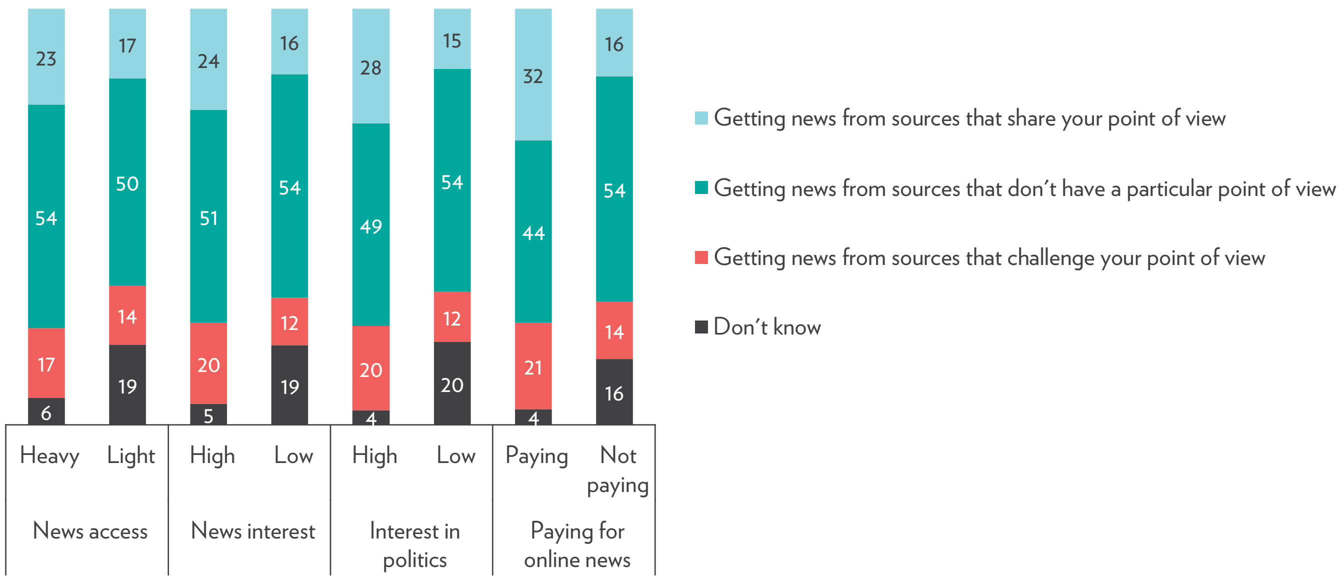
Figure 1.20: Preference for point of view in news by education, income and region (%)



Almost one third of those who pay for news prefer news that shares their point of view

Almost one in three of those who pay for news prefer news that shares their own point of view (32%) as do more than a quarter of participants with have high interest in politics (28%). Those with low interest in news (54%), low interest in politics (54%) or don't pay for news (54%) are more likely to get news from sources that don't have a particular point of view (see **figure 1.21**).

Figure 1.21: Preference for point of view in news by news access, news interest, interest in politics and paying for online news (%)



Left-wing (23%) and right-wing (24%) participants have very similar proportion of respondents who prefer news to share their point of view. Although there are more left-wing participants (57%) who say they prefer news to be neutral than right-wing (52%). Many in the centre (15%) don't know their preference (see **figure 1.22**).

Figure 1.22: Preference for point of view in news by political orientation (%)

Respondents were invited to explain why they preferred their chosen type of news source. For those who prefer to get news from sources that share their point of view, 20% say that it validates their values and 9% cite trust in familiar sources. Of those participants who prefer news that is neutral, 41% say that facts are closer to the truth and not biased, while 18% prefer to leave it up to people to make up their own minds. Finally, for those that chose news that challenges their viewpoint, 23% note critical thinking as the main reason while 15% are seeking diverse perspectives. Interestingly, almost a third (31%) of people who prefer like-minded news sources selected "Don't know" when asked why, compared with one in five neutral-news consumers (20%) and just over a quarter (27%) of those who prefer challenging news (see **table 1.1**).

Table 1.1: Top reasons of preference for point of view in news

Get news from sources that share their point of view	Validation of values	20%
	Trust in familiar sources	9%
Getting news from sources that don't have a particular point of view	Facts are closer to the truth/not biased	41%
	People need to make up their own mind	18%
Get news from sources that challenge their point of view	Critical thinking	23%
	Seeking diverse perspectives	15%

Half of the respondents say other people should also consume neutral news

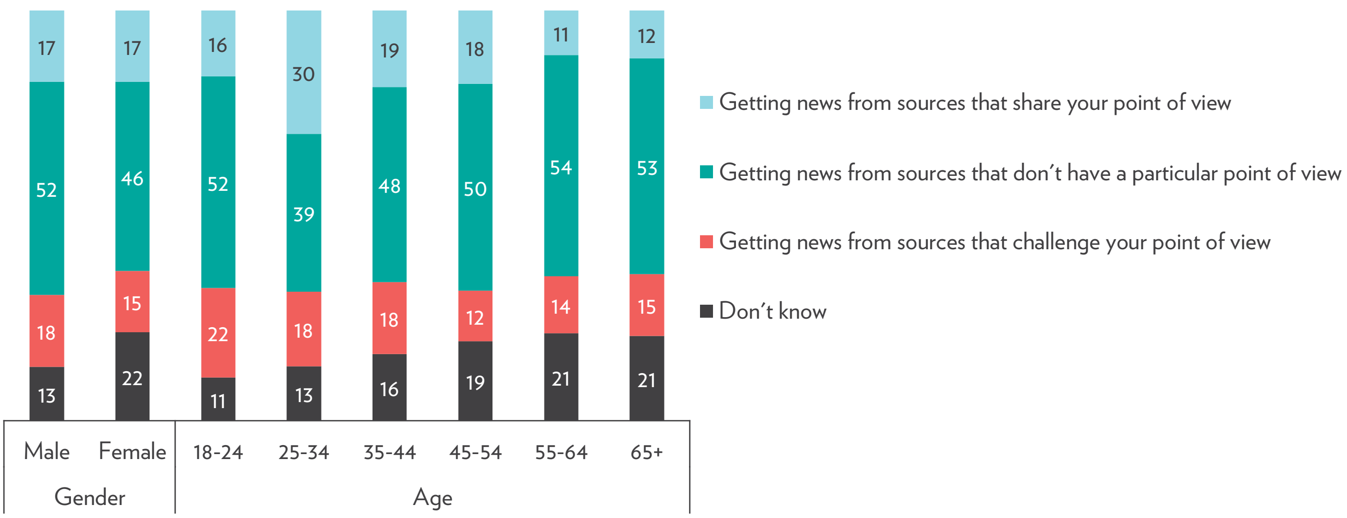
We also asked respondents the types of news they think *other people* in society should access. Similar to the results from their own perspective, participants believe others should access news that is neutral (49%). Seventeen percent say others should use news sources that agrees with their perspective and 16% say others should access news that challenges their own viewpoint (see **figure 1.23**).

Figure 1.23: Beliefs about how others should access news (%)

[Q5c_2013_2026] Thinking about the different kinds of news available, do you think other people in society should mainly... [Base *n* = 2,025]

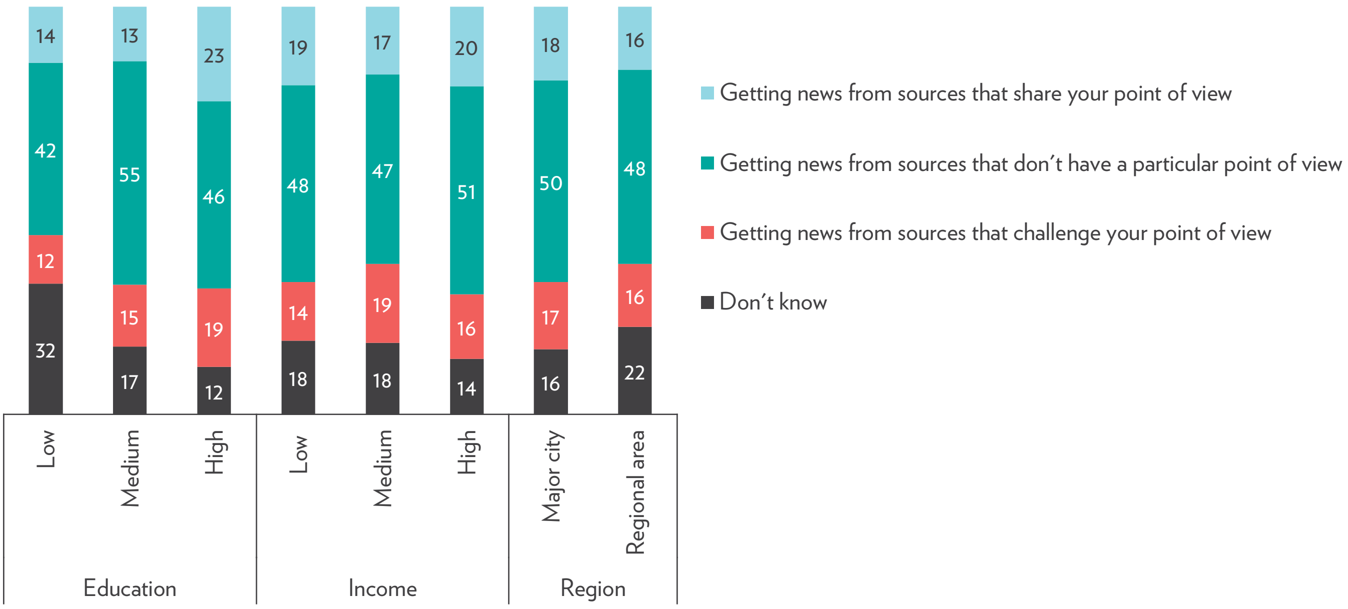
Generally, people think others should get news from sources that are neutral but there are differences between age groups. Those aged 25–34 are more likely than other age groups in thinking others should access news that shares their viewpoint (30%) (see **figure 1.24**).

Figure 1.24: Beliefs about how others should access news by gender and age (%)



Those with high education are more likely to say others should get news from sources that share their viewpoint (23%) compared to medium (13%) or low (14%) education groups. There were no significant differences in viewpoints with regards to income and region (see **figure 1.25**).

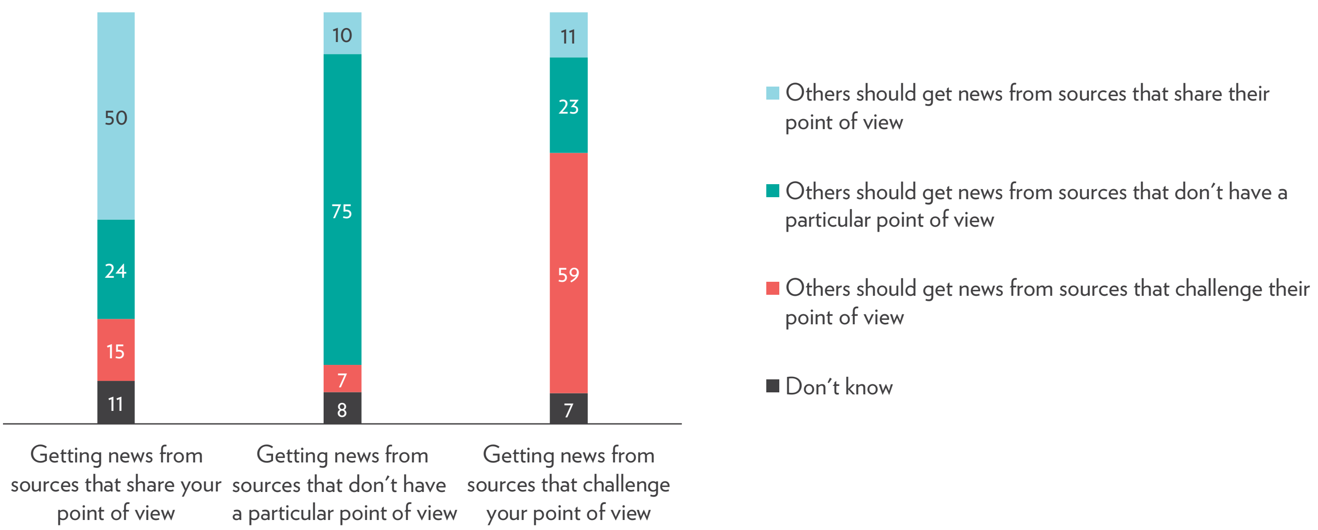
Figure 1.25: Beliefs about how others should access news by education, income and region (%)



Three-quarters of those who prefer news that is neutral say others should do so too

People generally want others to access news in the same way as they do. Three quarters (75%) of those who prefer to access news that is neutral say others should do so. On the other hand, 50% of those who prefer news that share their point of view and 59% of those who prefer news that challenge their point of view say others should do the same (see **figure 1.26**).

Figure 1.26: Beliefs about how others should access news by own preference for point of view in news (%)



PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

One in two Australians say public service media has a positive effect on Australian society

Almost half of participants think that news provided by public service media (PSM) have a very (19%) or somewhat (30%) positive effect on life in Australia compared to 21% who have a somewhat (12%) or very (9%) negative attitude.

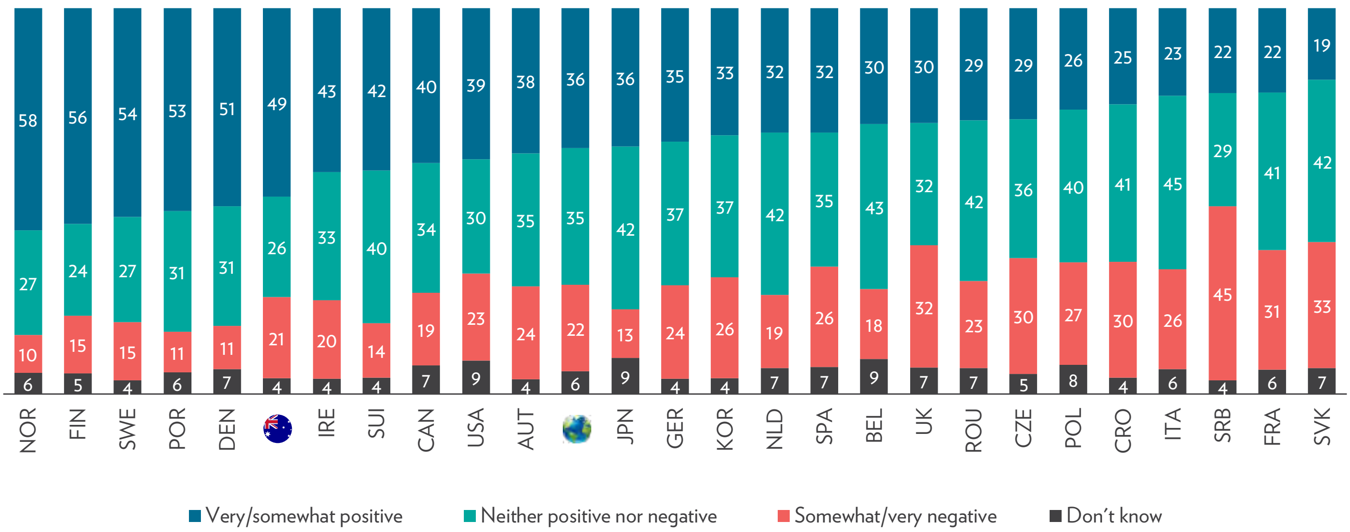
One in four (26%) are neither positive or negative about it and 4% are unsure, indicating ambivalence or indifference to the topic (see **figure 1.27**).

Figure 1.27: Value of public service media (%)

[Q_PSM_Attitude] Overall, do you think that news provided by public service broadcasters (e.g. XYZ) has a positive or negative effect on life in your country? [Base *n* = 2,025]

In 26 of the markets, we asked people their perceptions of PSM in their country. In comparison to other countries, Australia (49%) is significantly more positive than the global average (36%) about the value of PSM, although we are well below the Scandinavian countries: Norway (58%), Finland (56%) and Sweden (54%). We are, though, more than twice as likely to value it than participants in Slovakia (19%), France (22%) and Serbia (22%) (see **figure 1.28**).

Figure 1.28: Value of public service media by country (%)

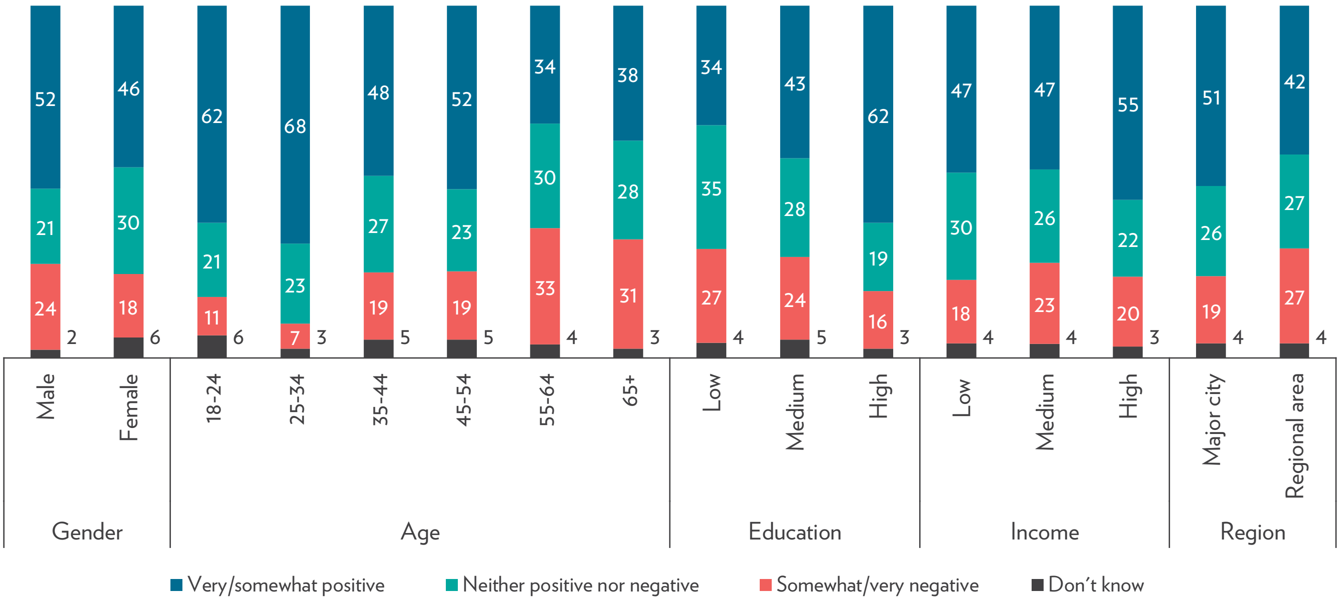


[Base *n* = 52,850]

Young people are more likely to believe public service media is valuable compared to older generations

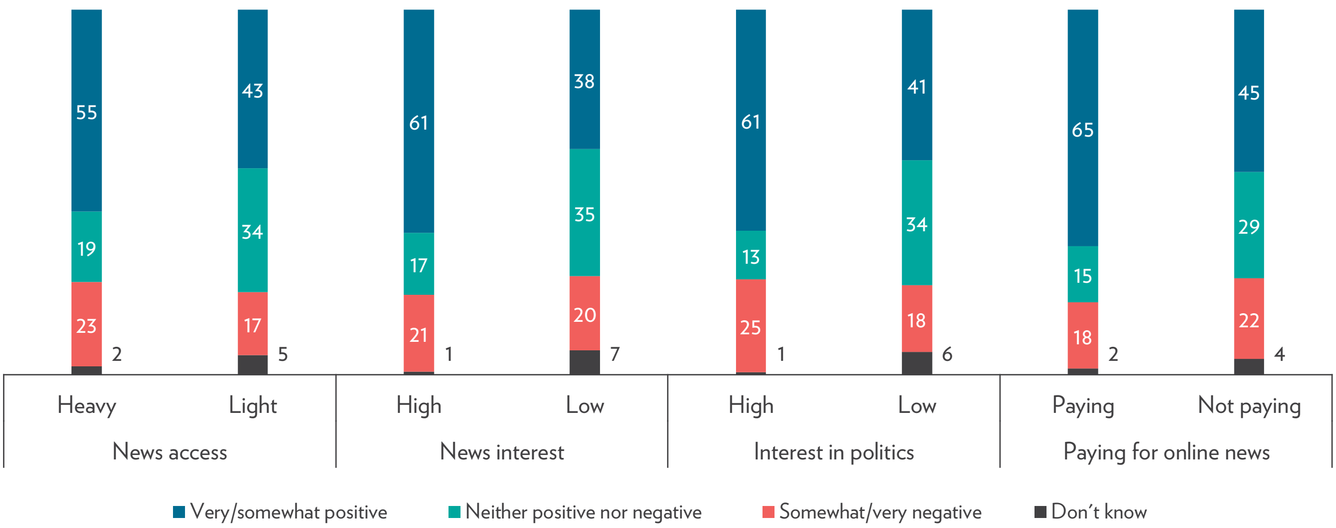
Men (52%), those with a high education (62%) and high income (55%), and who also live in a major city (51%) believe that PSM is valuable in society. The starkest difference, though, is in age. A higher proportion of U35s value PSM compared to 35+ but, more unexpected, those aged 25–34 (68%) are twice as likely as 55–64s (34%) to place a high value on PSM (see **figure 1.29**).

Figure 1.29: Value of public service media by demographics (%)



Heavy news users (55%) tend to value PSM more compared to light news users (43%). Similarly, those with high interest in news (61%), high interest in politics (61%) and who pay for online news (65%) value PSM more than those who have low interest (38%), are not interested in politics (41%) and don't pay for online news (45%) (see **figure 1.30**).

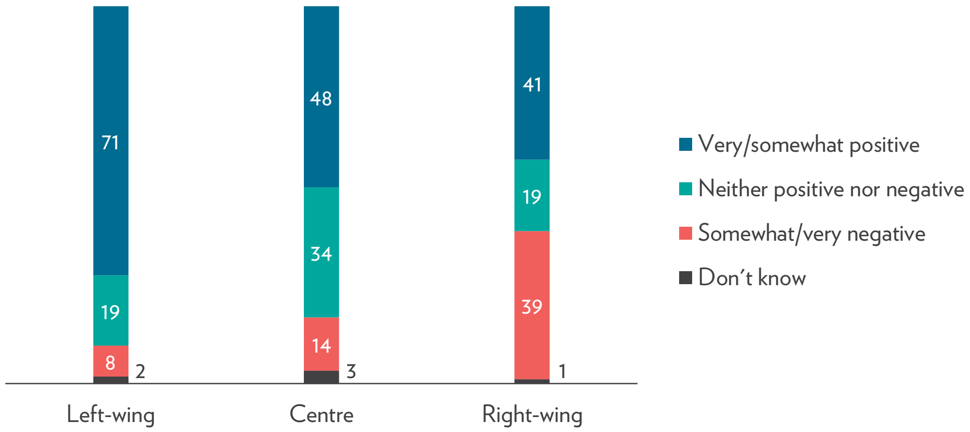
Figure 1.30: Value of public service media by news access, news interest, interest in politics and paying for online news (%)



Left-wing audiences are more likely to value PSM

The data revealed large differences based on political affiliation. Left-wing participants (71%) are significantly more likely to value PSM compared to those with a centre (48%) or right-wing political orientation (41%). Conversely, right-wing consumers are almost five times more likely to state that PSM is somewhat/very negative (39%) that those from the left (8%) (see **figure 1.31**).

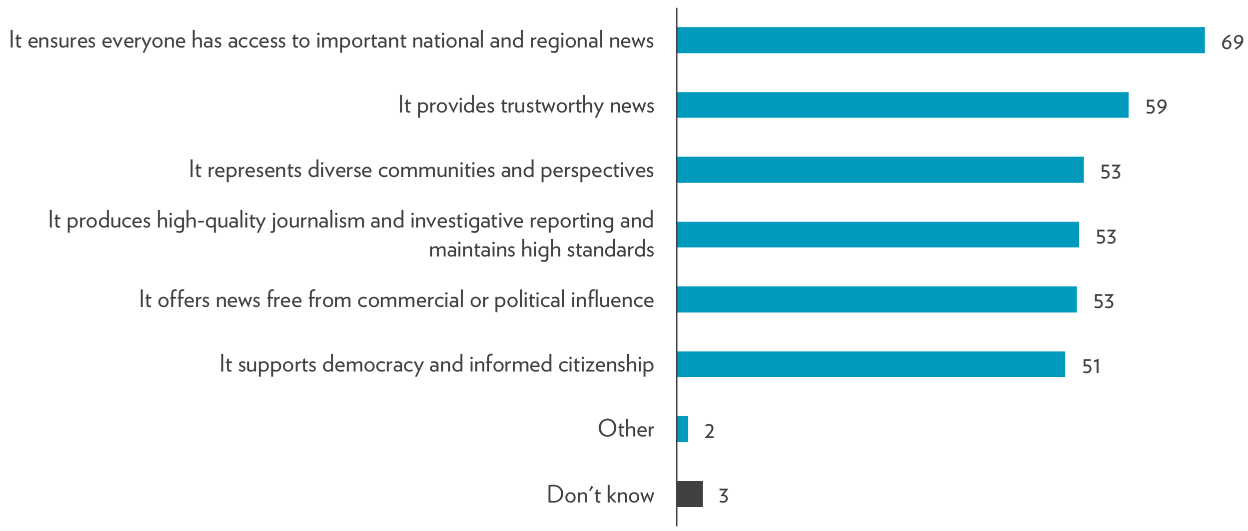
Figure 1.31: Value of public service media by political orientation (%)



Access to important national and regional news is the most positive aspect of public service media

We asked which aspects of PSM are positive to those respondents who said that PSMs have a positive effect on society. Respondents are most likely to say PSM ensures that everyone has access to important national and regional news (69%), followed by providing trustworthy news (59%). Diversity (53%), high quality journalism and standards (53%), and news free from influence (53%) are also considered positive aspects by more than half of those who view PSM as positive in general (see **figure 1.32**).

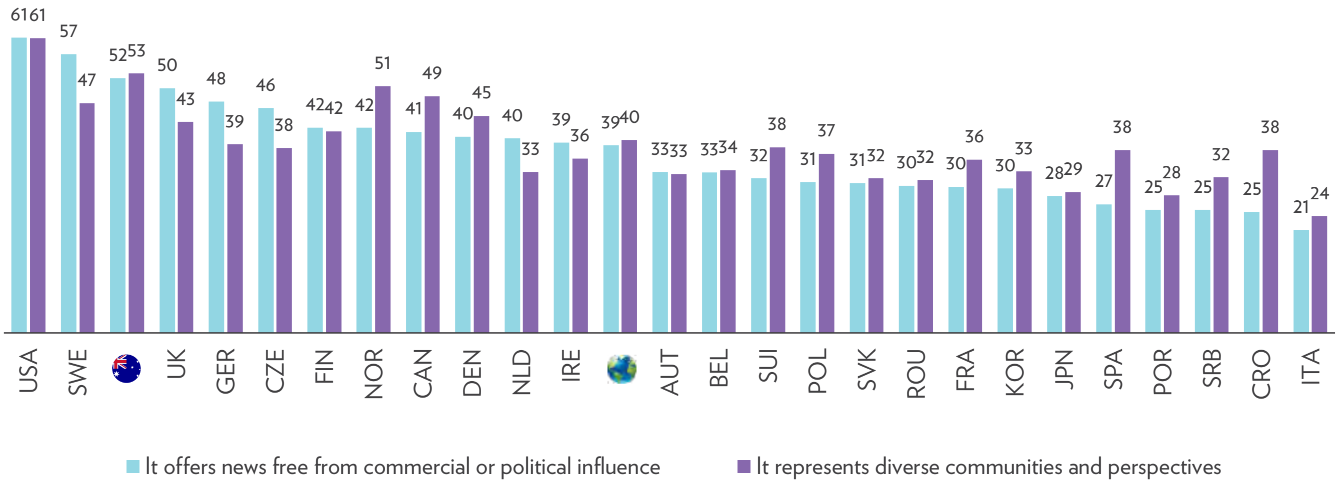
Figure 1.32: Positive aspects of public service media (%)



[Q_PSM_PositiveAspects] Which of the following, if any, do you think are the positive aspects of news provided by public service or publicly funded media in your country? Please select all that apply.
[Base: those who answered Very/somewhat positive to PSM Attitude, *n* = 990]

Australians who have positive views about PSM are more likely to value it because it offers news free from commercial and political influence (52%), compared to the global average (39%). Australians are also much more likely to value PSM because it represents diverse communities and perspectives (53%) compared to the global average (40%) (see **figure 1.33**).

Figure 1.33: Positive aspects of public service media by country (%)

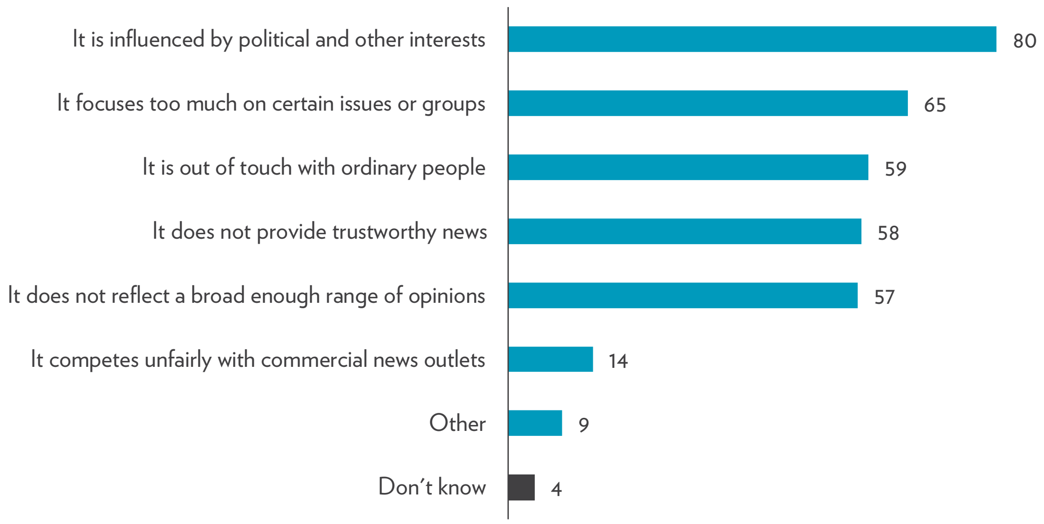


[Base: those who answered Very/somewhat positive to PSM Attitude, *n* = 19,205]

Those who view PSM as having a negative impact are most likely to say they are influenced by politics

We also asked about the negative aspects of PSM among the 21% of respondents who view PSM as having a negative impact on Australian life. Four out of five (80%) of these respondents say that PSM are influenced by political and other interests. Other reasons include having too much focus on certain issues or groups (65%), being out of touch with ordinary people (59%), providing untrustworthy news (58%), and not representing a broad enough range of opinions (57%). A small number of people (14%) say PMS competes unfairly with commercial media (see **figure 1.34**).

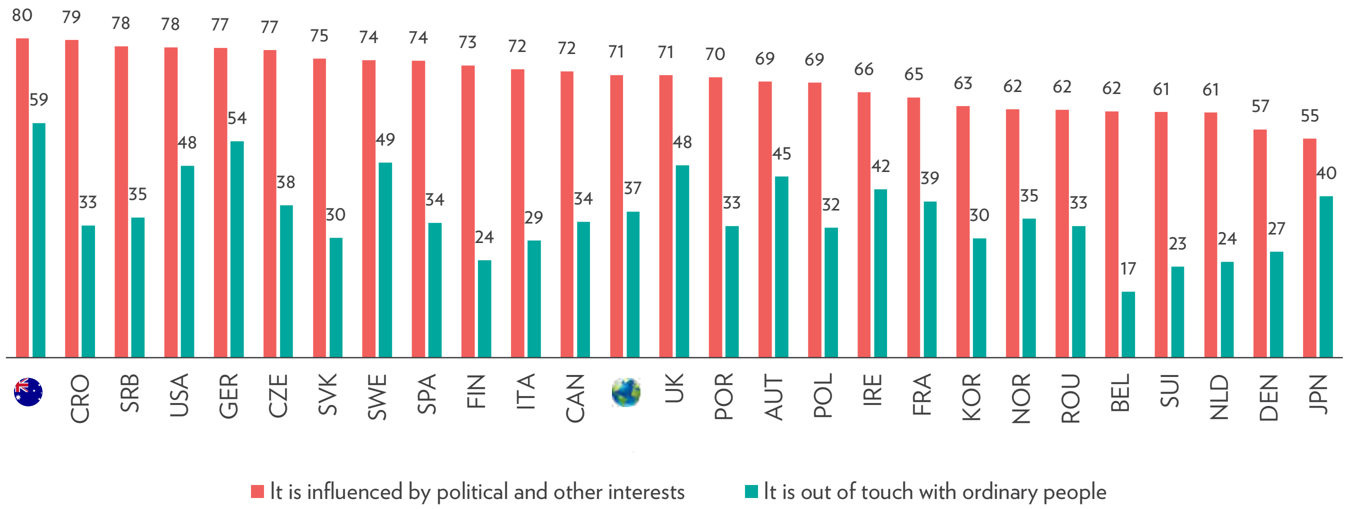
Figure 1.34: Negative aspects of public service media (%)



[Q_PSM_NegativeAspects] Which of the following, if any, do you think are the negative aspects of news provided by public service or publicly funded media in your country? Please select all that apply.
[Base: those who answered Very/somewhat negative to PSM Attitude, *n* = 428]

For those who have a very/somewhat negative view of PSM, Australia tops the global list in the proportion saying PSM are influenced by political or other interests (80%) followed closely by Croatia (79%), Serbia (78%) and the USA (78%). Being out of touch with ordinary people was also top of the list with Australian respondents at 59% leading Germany (54%) and Sweden (49%). At the other end of the scale, Japan (55%) and Denmark (57%) are less likely to be negative about influences and Belgium, at 17% has the lowest negative attitude to PSM when it comes to being out of touch with ordinary people (see **figure 1.35**).

Figure 1.35: Negative aspects of public service media by country (%)



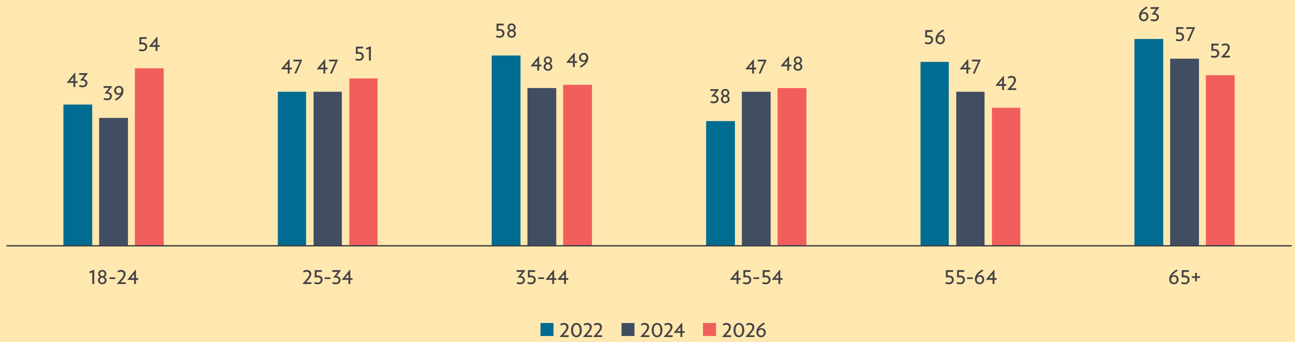
[Base: those who answered Very/somewhat negative to PSM Attitude, *n* = 11,859]

Young people are increasingly using PSM to get news

Overall, our data suggests a shift in public service media use, with engagement rising among younger audiences while declining among older groups.

Between 2022 and 2026, use has increased among younger audiences, particularly those aged 18–24, from 43% to 54%. A smaller increase is also evident among 25–34 (from 47% to 51%). Use has declined among older age groups. Among those aged 65 and over, the use of PSM has fallen from 63% in 2022 to 52% in 2026, while among those aged 55–64 it has decreased from 56% to 42% (see **figure 1.36**).

Figure 1.36: Public service media use by age 2022–2026 (%)



[Base: those who said they had used to access any of the following news outlets: ABC TV, SBS TV, ABC Radio, SBS Radio, ABC News online, or SBS News online, *n* = 1075 (2022), 976 (2024), 996 (2026)]

SUMMARY

In recent years, globally significant events have created uncertainty and chaos, contributing to the rise of inflation and cost of living. Australians are evenly split on whether the news media is doing a good or a bad job of reporting on major issues. Around a third say news organisations are doing neither a good nor bad job of covering issues like global conflicts and the cost-of-living crisis. News payers generally have a more positive view about the quality of coverage, suggesting that many see their news subscriptions as good value for money. However, regional consumers are less satisfied with the way the news is covered, which may be due to the lack of localised reporting on major issues.

Interestingly, young people are more positive about the quality of news coverage compared to older generations. They also place high value on public service media. Traditionally, young people have been less frequent news consumers; however in recent years there are signs this may be changing. Since 2023, 18–24-year-olds have increased their news consumption from 36% to 49%. There was an increase in young people's use of public service media as well in the past year (see **Chapter 4**). This indicates that even if it may not be part of their day-to-day news consumption, PSM brands are there for them when they need to know about major events.

The majority of Australians believe that media owners, government and politicians, and advertisers have an influence. Political orientation is an important factor that shapes people's views about external influences. Left-leaning audiences are much more likely to think media owners have a big influence, whereas right-leaning audiences say activists and advocacy groups, and experts have a high influence on news reporting.

COMMENTARY

EVOLVING TO SERVE AUDIENCES

David Sutton, Senior Executive Policy & Regulatory Affairs, ABC

Public service media (PSM) organisations exist to provide a baseline of independent, high-quality media to all citizens regardless of location or capacity to pay. Over the past decade, they have been under sustained pressure from political actors and governments around the world. Beyond rhetorical attacks on the idea of PSM, this has included funding cuts, stacked boards and legislative changes by governments.

For an observer of PSM, it is hard not to see signs of the corrosive effect of such attacks in the global perceptions of public media reported in the *Digital News Report: Australia 2026*. On average, slightly more than a third (36%) of people say that public media have a positive effect on life in their country, while one in five (22%) instead say its effects are negative. In eight countries, including the United Kingdom, more people see PSM as having a negative effect than a positive one.

Against this backdrop, it is heartening to see that the Australian public continue to value the news services that their PSMs deliver to them. Roughly half of the population (49%) say ABC and SBS news services have a positive effect on Australian life.

Those who do tend to point to fundamental PSM attributes, such as universality, impartiality, diversity and high editorial standards.

Further, Australians under 35 are much more likely than average (66%) to regard PSM news positively. This is an encouraging result, as the ABC's own audience research shows that its average audiences tend to be older and that younger Australians are most likely to encounter ABC content on social media platforms.

Interestingly, the report shows a slight rise in under-35s' use of traditional PSM broadcast and web platforms. Given geopolitical uncertainties and the spread of mis- and disinformation, this may reflect a desire for reliable news, much as people come to the ABC in the face of bushfires, floods and pandemics. It may also reflect encounters with PSM news content on social and other third-party platforms that is not captured in the data.

These findings confirm past ABC decisions to invest in a breadth of emerging platforms to offer news to audiences where they choose to consume it. The ABC is already the leading online news service and it engages actively with social media platforms. There are clear opportunities to further serve younger Australians.

Further adaptation is required. It is acknowledged, for example, that affluent and educated audiences are more likely to use ABC services. It is thus unsurprising that fewer people with lower education or income levels value PSM, but also a sign that PSM need to work harder at delivering content relevant to them and their needs.

As PSM organisations trace a path forward, however, it is important to be aware that perceptions of PSM do not occur in a vacuum.

A fifth (21%) of respondents in the *Digital News Report: Australia 2026* say that PSM has a negative effect on Australian life. While these respondents are not homogenous, certain characteristics are more common, including being older and identifying as right-wing.

These are not simple patterns. While right-leaning respondents are less likely to value PSM than those on the left or the centre, they are almost evenly split between viewing it positively or negatively. Similarly, about as many Australians aged over 55 believe PSM have a negative effect on Australia as see them positively There is also a less-pronounced trend for people from regional Australia to view PSM news negatively.

As people who attribute negative value to PSM are very likely to distrust all news — roughly twice as likely as the average — it is no surprise that they regard PSM as untrustworthy. Similarly, in relation to independence — a defining characteristic of public media — an overwhelming majority (80%) believe that PSM are influenced by political and other interests. Needless to say, these patterns contrast sharply with those who believe PSM make positive contributions to Australian life.

There is no simple answer to how PSM should respond to audiences who hold negative views of public media. Perceptions that PSM news "focuses too much on certain issues or groups" or is "out of touch with ordinary people" need to be taken seriously. At the same time, key characteristics of the group match broader patterns of polarisation observed in the polity at large and their apparent attitudes match talking points at the heart of partisan attacks on PSM around the world.

What is clear, however, is that public media must continue to adapt their services to meet people where they are, as that is how they will also find the audiences of the future. Consequently, these perceptions may be difficult to shift.

COMMENTARY

YOUNG AUSTRALIANS VALUE PURPOSE, SOCIAL IMPACT AND INCLUSION — AND THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR NEWS ORGANISATIONS

Mandi Wicks, Director of News and Current Affairs, SBS

At a time when news organisations are under increasing financial and distribution pressures, the *Digital News Report: Australia 2026* provides interesting insights into the value of journalism to Australian audiences.

The report suggests the perceived value is shaped by several intersecting factors, including how major issues, such as climate change, cost of living and migration are reported, as well as audience demographics, political preferences, news consumption habits and the extent to which audiences believe media owners, politicians and advertisers influence news coverage.

Overall, Australians appear ambivalent about the news media's performance on major issues. The most positive assessment is for coverage of inflation and the cost of living — even then only 36% of news consumers say the news media is doing a 'good job'. Coverage of migration and immigration issues is ranked the lowest — only 23% believe the media is doing a 'good job' and 37% rate the coverage as 'bad'.

It seems audiences are sending a clear message that news organisations are not meeting their expectations on issues that arguably matter most to them.

The report also highlights a 'quality gap' in perceptions of news coverage. Under 35s, those with higher education, heavy news consumers, TV news consumers and those who pay for online news are more likely to rate the 'quality of reporting' positively. By contrast, regional audiences and those who mainly access news through social media are less satisfied with the quality of news reporting, which indicates perceptions of journalism's value are linked to content, access (which could be due to a reduction in regional services), platform use, geography and willingness or capacity to pay.

Another key theme in the report is distrust of media independence — 77% of those surveyed believe media owners and parent companies influence news coverage, 75% think government officials and politicians have influence and 70% cite advertisers as having influence. Political orientation can shape these perceptions: left-leaning audiences are more likely to identify media owners as influential, while right-leaning audiences are more likely to identify the influence of activists, advocacy groups, government and politicians. And while Australia's distrust of media independence is higher than the global average, 51% of those surveyed say they prefer 'neutral' news, with 41% of that cohort claiming 'neutral' news is more accurate and unbiased.

Twenty percent of those surveyed prefer news that shares their point of view. There are generational differences, with nearly one-third (30%) of 25–34-year-olds indicating this compared to only 12% of 55–64-year-olds. Similarly, almost one-third (32%) of respondents who pay for news and 28% of respondents with a greater interest in politics prefer news which shares their point of view.

Australia sits well above the global average in terms of positive sentiment towards public service media.

Almost half (49%) value public service media, compared to the global average (36%). Twenty-one percent of Australians have a 'somewhat negative' or 'very negative attitude' and 26% are 'neutral'. The most valued characteristic of public service media among supporters is universal access, followed by trustworthy news, diversity, high-quality journalism and news free from commercial or political influence.

Potentially one of the most interesting findings is that younger Australians appear to value public service media more than older Australians. Under 35s are more positive than over 55s, and 25–34-year-olds value public service media at twice the level of those aged 55–64 (68% vs. 34%). Public service media usage also appears to be increasing among younger audiences while declining among older age groups. From 2022 to 2026, usage rose among 18–24-year-olds (43% to 54%) and 25–34-year-olds (47% to 51%), while falling among those aged 55–64 (56% to 42%) and 65+ (63% to 52%).

The research doesn't capture insights into why younger audiences are increasingly valuing and engaging with public service media. The 18–34 demographic is more multicultural and globally connected than older Australians.

Many value purpose, social impact and inclusion, and are concerned about financial security, affordable housing, mental health and wellbeing, and climate change.

They are also more exposed to influencer-led content, algorithm-driven social media feeds and AI-generated news, and in this context perhaps younger audiences view public service media as a trusted reference point in an increasingly noisy information ecosystem.

For public service media more broadly, there is an opportunity to build on the growing value younger audiences place on these services by continuing to demonstrate independence through impartiality and by countering misinformation and polarisation, promoting inclusion and clearly articulating the important role of public service media in a healthy democratic system.

COMMENTARY

HOW DO OPINIONS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC SERVICE NEWS ON LIFE IN AUSTRALIA COMPARE WITH INTERNATIONAL ATTITUDES?

Jim Egan, Senior Research Associate, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford

In 26 of the *Digital News Report* markets we conducted new research this year to ask people their thoughts about the impact on national life in their countries of news from public service media (PSM) providers. The results reveal interesting insights about attitudes both across countries and also within them. In most countries, PSM news provision has long been an important part not just of the news ecosystem but of society more broadly. However, in a number of markets, consensus seems to be fraying about the role and impact of public service news. But before the new data, some context.

How have audiences for news from the ABC and SBS held up over the last decade?

Figure 1 shows total reach, whether online or offline (i.e, TV and radio) for news from the ABC and SBS over the last decade. For comparison total reach is also shown for news in the UK from the BBC and Channel 4 (a public service entity with a remit similar, but not identical, that of SBS).

Despite an extended period of strategic disruption and major changes in consumer behaviour over the last decade, total reach for news from the ABC and SBS is largely unchanged over the last 10 years. This is a broadly similar picture to Channel 4 news in the UK, while the BBC has seen its total reach for news fall from 78% to 64% of the UK population over the same, albeit from a very high level initially.

Looking at trust in public service news, figures for the ABC and SBS are remarkably similar. Trust in news from these two public service outlets has fallen gradually since 2018 from about three-quarters to two-thirds of Australians saying they consider news from these outlets to be trustworthy. ABC and SBS news continue to enjoy a trustworthiness premium relative to Australians' trust in news overall. What is worth noticing is the gradual increase in the proportion of Australians who say they don't trust news from either the ABC or SBS, this has basically doubled since 2018 and points to a theme we shall return to shortly.

Figure 1: Proportion that say they consume any news from public service providers each week 2016 to 2026 (Australia and UK)

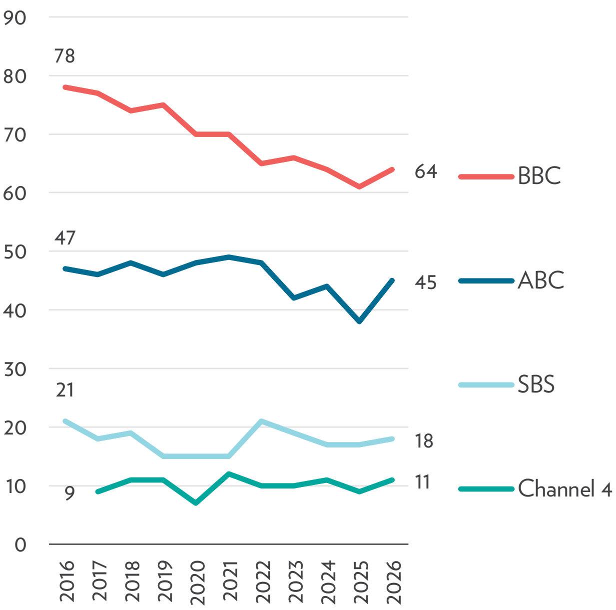
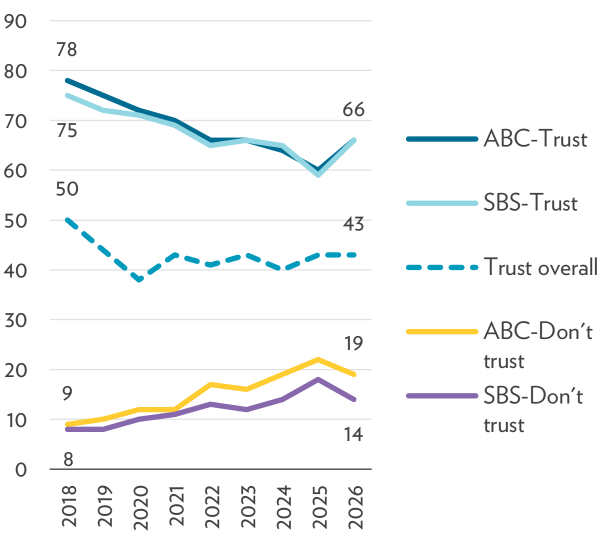


Figure 2: Proportion that say they trust news overall, trust ABC/SBS news, and don't trust ABC/SBS news



Do Australians think public service news has a positive or negative impact on life in their country?

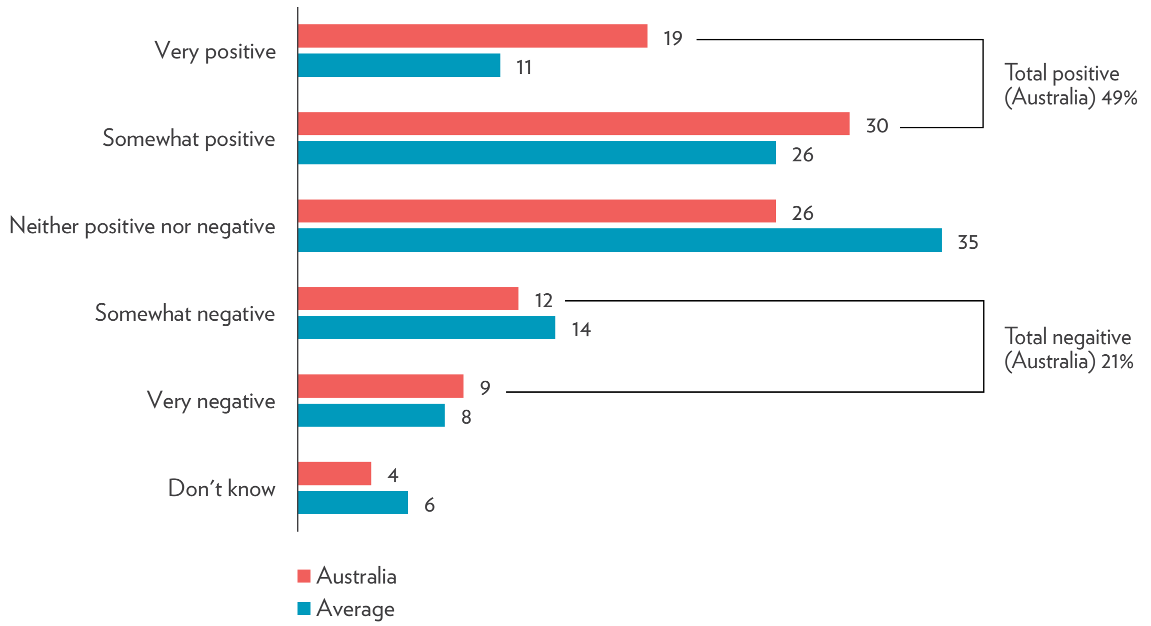
We asked people in more than two dozen markets whether they consider news provided by PSM to have a positive or negative effect on life in their country. (We did not ask about specific organisations, but in the question we gave an example of a PSM news provider in each country.) As the chart below shows, half of Australians (49%) believe that news from the ABC and SBS has a positive impact on national life. A quarter (26%) think that public service news is neither positive nor negative — there could be a range of reasons for this (which we didn't explore). One fifth of respondents in Australia believe public service news has either a somewhat or very negative social impact.

Compared to the global data overall, Australians are significantly more positive about the social role of public service news (49% in Australia compared to 37% globally), there are fewer people who have a mixed view and about the same proportion of respondents who are negative.

Deducting the percentage of people who are negative about public service news (21%) in Australia from those who are positive (49%) gives a 'net positive' figure of 28 percentage points (pp). The global average net positive figure is 15pp, but there were some wide variations in the results. Australia's net positive figure of 28pp is the seventh highest of the 26 markets we surveyed. Norway was highest overall at 48pp, the UK is one of a few markets where the net view is neither positive nor negative (-2pp) and there were five markets where net opinion about the social impact of public service news is in fact negative, with the lowest being in Serbia at -23pp.

Really big differences emerge when looking at reach of public service news and trust in news generally. Sixty-one percent of people who are positive about the impact of public service media news say they trust news overall in Australia compared to just 22% of people who are negative. Reach for ABC and SBS news among people who are positive about the social impact of public service news is approximately 90%, whereas among those who are negative about the social impact of public service news is 31% for SBS and only 21% for ABC.

Figure 3: Proportion that agrees with each description of effect of public service news on life in their country (Australia and 26 market average)

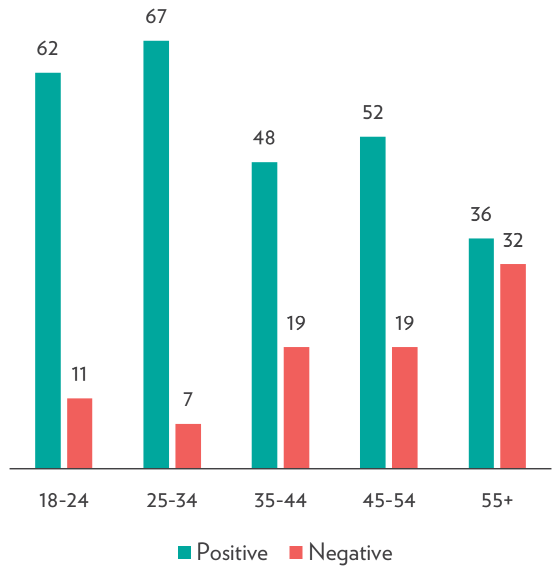


Age matters

People's age appears to be a significant factor in shaping Australian attitudes. As the chart shows, younger Australians are the most positive about the social impact of PSM news, with people in the 25–34 age group being 60pp net positive. Among those aged 55+ net positivity drops very significantly to only 4pp. At least as far as ABC is concerned, these differences in attitude by age do not seem to be connected to reach: total reach to ABC news is almost identical across all age groups. (For SBS, news reach declines with age from 18% in the 18–24 age group to 8% for people aged 45 and over.)

The influence of age is also much more pronounced in Australia than elsewhere. Looking simply at attitudes among two broad groups of people — under-35s and those aged 35+ — the relative figures are: 57pp net positive for under 35s in Australia (22pp globally) and 16pp net positive for those 35 and above (12pp globally). This significant relative enthusiasm among younger Australians contrasts with some of the narrative about younger people's disengagement with the news.

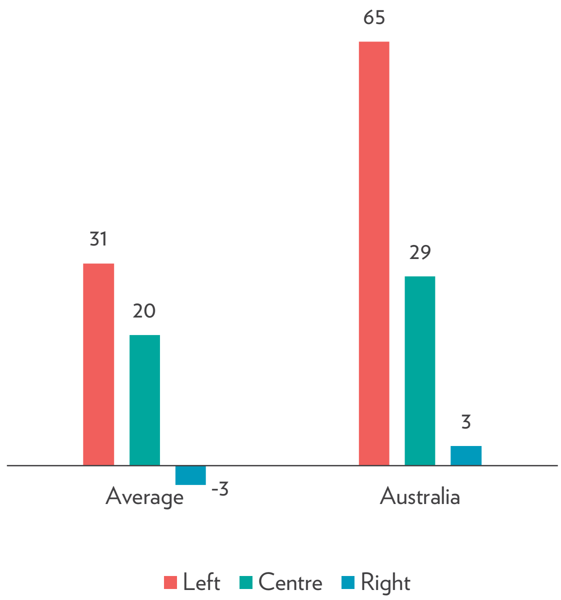
Figure 4: Proportions that say they are positive or negative about the social impact of public service news by age group (Australia)



Political leaning a clear dividing line

Given the growing presence of polarising forces in domestic politics in many countries, it is perhaps of little surprise that people's political viewpoints seem to have a bearing on what they think about the social impact of public service news. Taking an average of the global data, people on the left of the political spectrum are typically more positive about the impact of public service news on life in their country than those in the centre and on the right. In a number of markets, including the US, the UK, Canada, France, Germany and Spain, the net view among right-leaning respondents is negative towards the impact of public service news. As the chart shows, the same pattern is true in Australia. Even though, on average, Australians are quite positive about the role public service news plays in national life, people on the right are only just net positive overall (+3pp) and there is a very big left-right spread between people of different political persuasions. This obviously presents a challenge both for policy makers and, of course, for public service news providers themselves who have universal mandates to serve all citizens and to reflect the full range of perspectives which make up contemporary society.

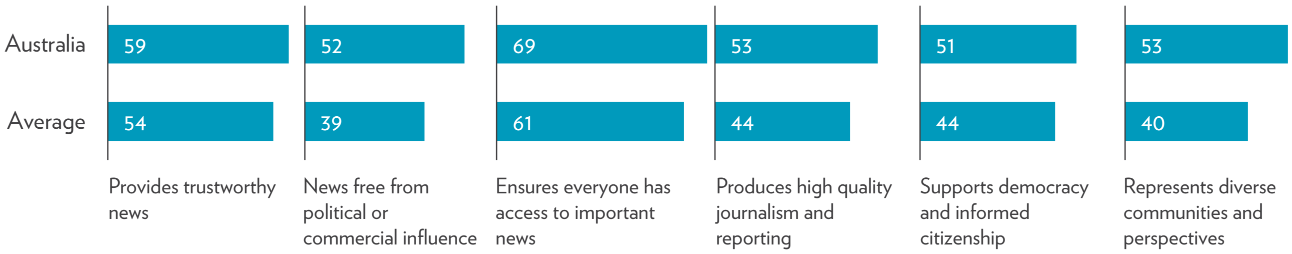
Figure 5: Net proportion that say they are positive about the social impact of public service news by political orientation (Australia and 26 market average)



What do people who are positive about the social impact of public service news like most?

Depending on people's responses to the first question about their attitudes overall, we then asked a follow-up question of people who said they were either negative or positive[2] to ask them what it is about news from public service providers which they either like or dislike. On average, Australians are more positive about each aspect we asked about than people globally. In a relative sense, Australians who are positive about the social impact of public service news consider the provision of news free from political or commercial influence and news which represents diverse communities and perspectives to be particularly significant. It is worth noting that the proportion of respondents in Australia selecting each option were among the top eight of all the 26 markets for each of the attributes we asked about in **figure 6**.

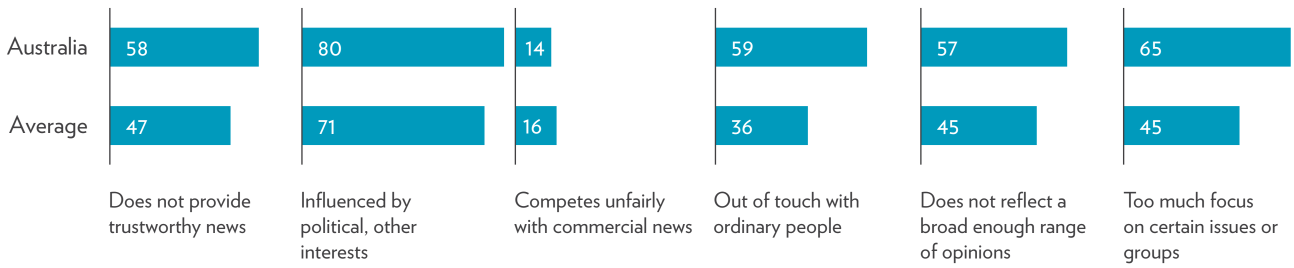
Figure 6: Proportion that agrees with each description of effect of public service news on life in their country (Australia and 26 market average)



What do people who are negative about the social impact of public service news dislike most?

Something which is very telling is that Australians who are negative about the social impact of public service news feel just as strongly in a relative sense as those who are positive. Among this group, more Australians agreed that public service news is influenced by political and other interests, that it is out of touch with ordinary people, and that news from public service providers focuses too much on certain issues or groups than respondents in any other market around the world. The only aspect where Australians with a negative viewpoint were less concerned than the global average is on the question of unfair competition with commercial news providers.

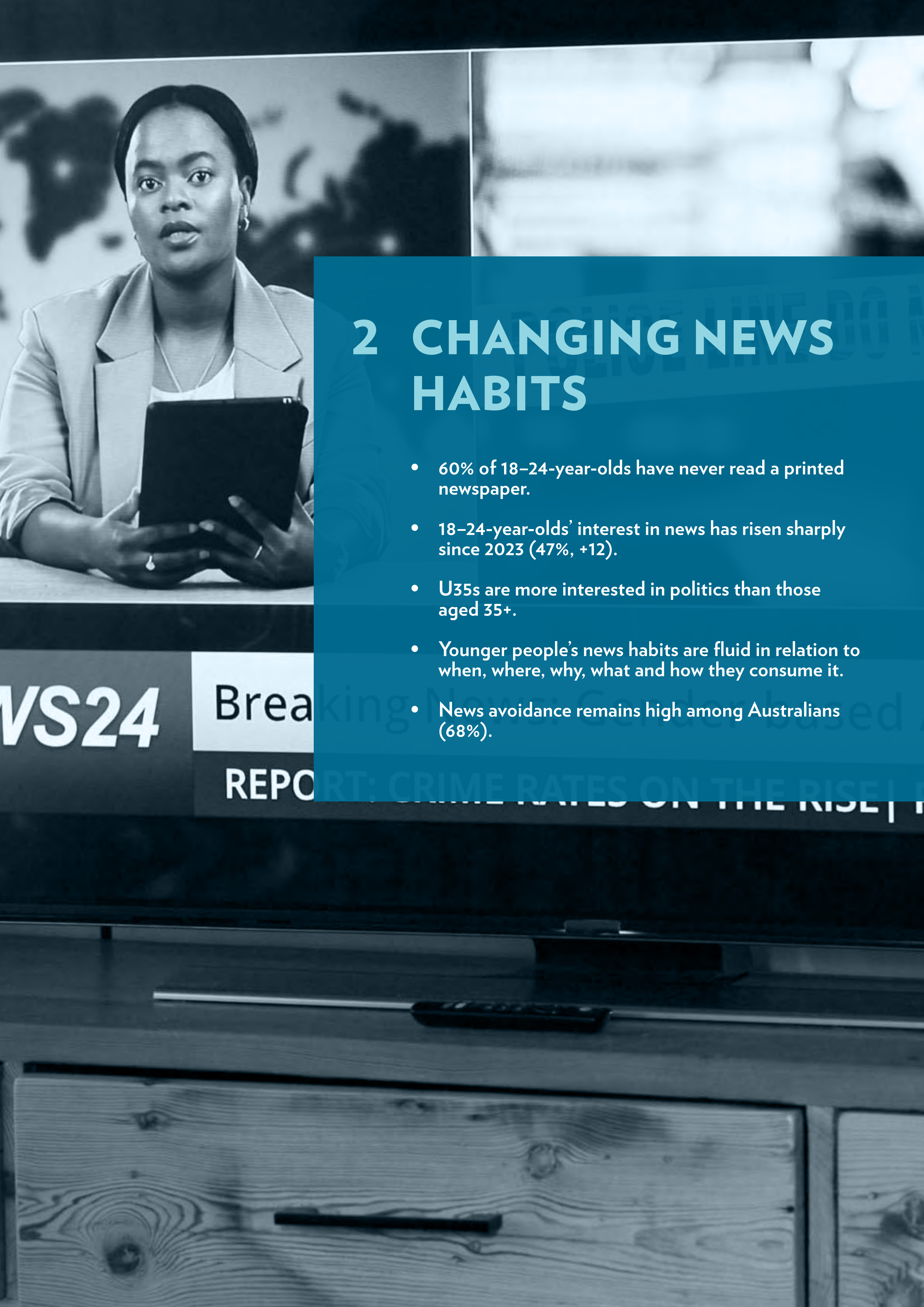
Figure 7: Proportion of respondents who are negative about the social impact of public service news that agrees with each (Australia and 26 market average)



[2] No follow-up question was asked of people saying they were neither positive nor negative

Conclusions

These results paint an interesting picture overall about Australians' views on the social impact of public service news compared to attitudes in other countries. Overall, Australian attitudes are in the most positive quartile of the 26 markets we surveyed. Support for the social impact of PSM news is relatively high in Australia (49%) compared to the global average (38%). In line with the global average, about a fifth of people (21%) in Australia are not just indifferent or neutral, they believe public service news actually has a negative impact on national life. People who hold this negative opinion are much less likely to trust news overall and, unsurprisingly given their views, are significantly less likely to get any news from either the ABC or SBS. Political viewpoints appear to be closely related with attitudes about the social impact of public service news, with a very big spread in terms of positivity overall between those on the left and the right of the political spectrum. The role and impact of news from the ABC and SBS feels less like a matter of consensus and more of an intensifying debate: people in Australia, whether they are positive or negative, appear to have views which are firmly held and enthusiastically expressed in both directions. Unlike commercial news entities, public service news providers are not able to choose between audiences. In serving all Australians, PSM news organisations need to continue to reassure supporters about their positive role in national life while seeking to address the indifference of those who have neither a positive or negative view, and to understand and engage with the concerns of the 21% of Australians who believe public service news is not good for the country.



2 CHANGING NEWS HABITS

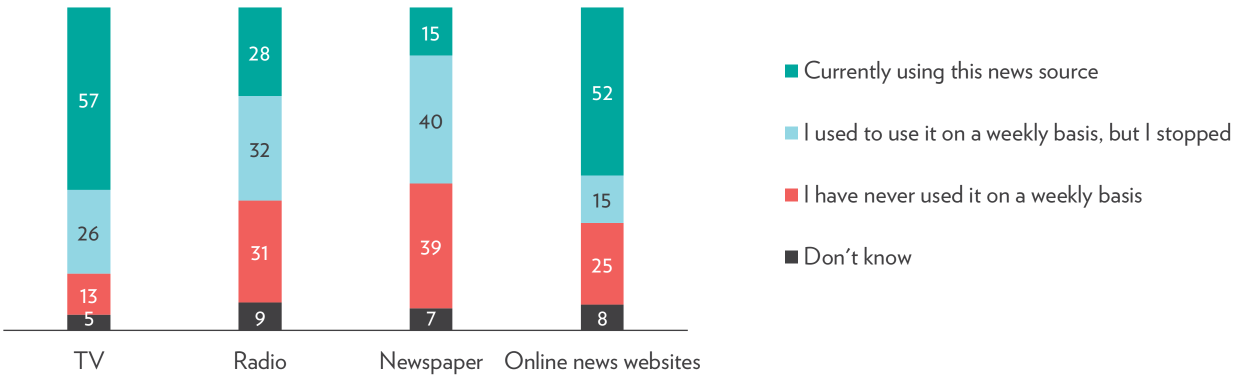
- 60% of 18–24-year-olds have never read a printed newspaper.
- 18–24-year-olds' interest in news has risen sharply since 2023 (47%, +12).
- U35s are more interested in politics than those aged 35+.
- Younger people's news habits are fluid in relation to when, where, why, what and how they consume it.
- News avoidance remains high among Australians (68%).

CHANGING NEWS HABITS

40% of news consumers have stopped using newspapers

This year, we asked news consumers about their perceptions of their own news habits and routines. We asked respondents who have not used TV, radio, newspaper or online news in the past week about their past usage of each medium. Two-fifths of respondents (40%) say they used to read newspapers on a weekly basis but have stopped. By comparison, fewer people say they stopped using radio (32%) or TV (26%). Only 15% of online news users say they have stopped but more people (25%) say they never used them on a weekly basis (see **figure 2.1**).

Figure 2.1: Change in the use of news sources (%)



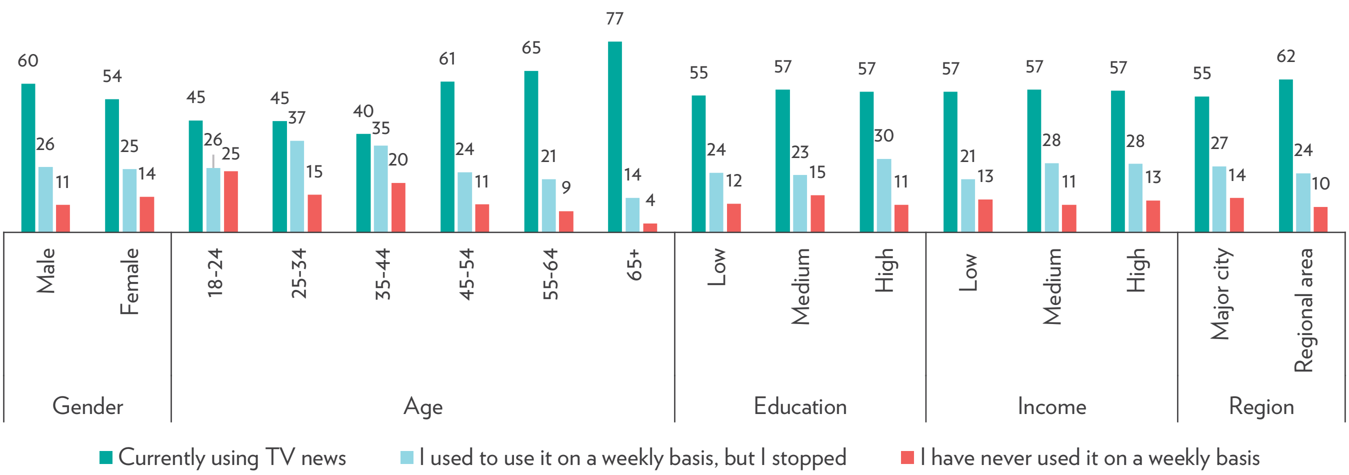
[Q3_Ever] You said that you did not access news from the below source(s) in the last week... Which of the following statements best describes your past usage of this source(s) of news? [Base: *n* = 2,025]

One quarter of 18–24-year-olds have never watched news on TV

Those aged 25–34 and 35–44 are the most likely to say they have stopped watching TV news (37%, 35%). The youngest age cohort (18–24) has the highest proportion of respondents saying they have never used TV news (25%).

Regional consumers are less likely to say they have stopped watching TV news or have never used it compared to city dwellers (see **figure 2.2**).

Figure 2.2: Change in the use of TV news by demographics (%)

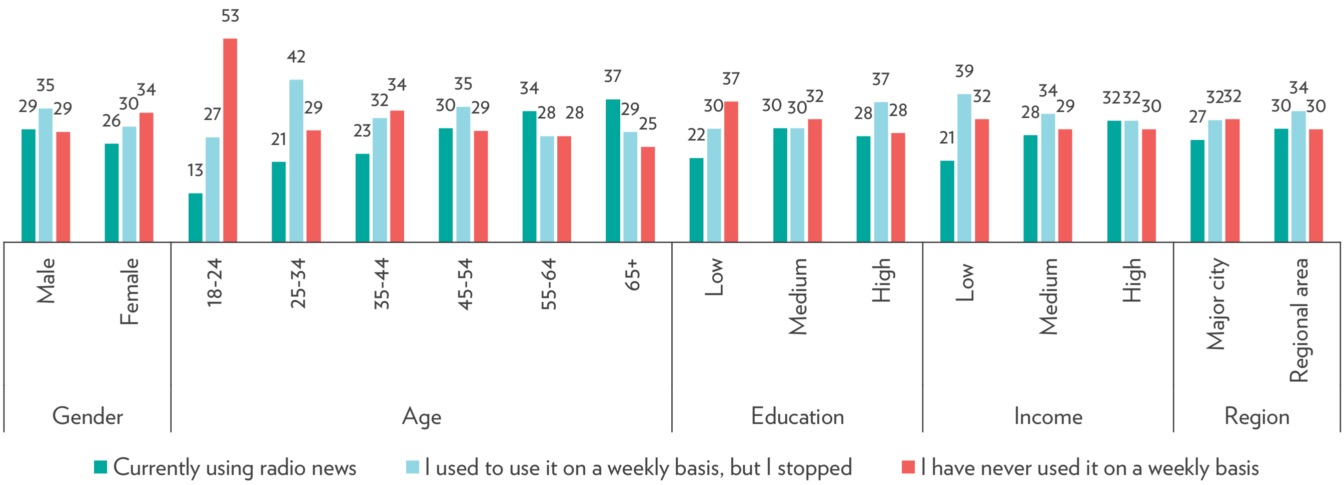


[Base: *n* = 2,025] *excluded 'don't know

42% of 25–34-year-olds have stopped using radio as a source of news

More than half (53%) of 18–24s have never used radio as a news medium and 27% say they have stopped using it. More than a third of those with high education (37%), low income (39%) and regional consumers (34%) say they have stopped using radio news (see **figure 2.3**).

Figure 2.3: Change in the use of radio news by demographics (%)

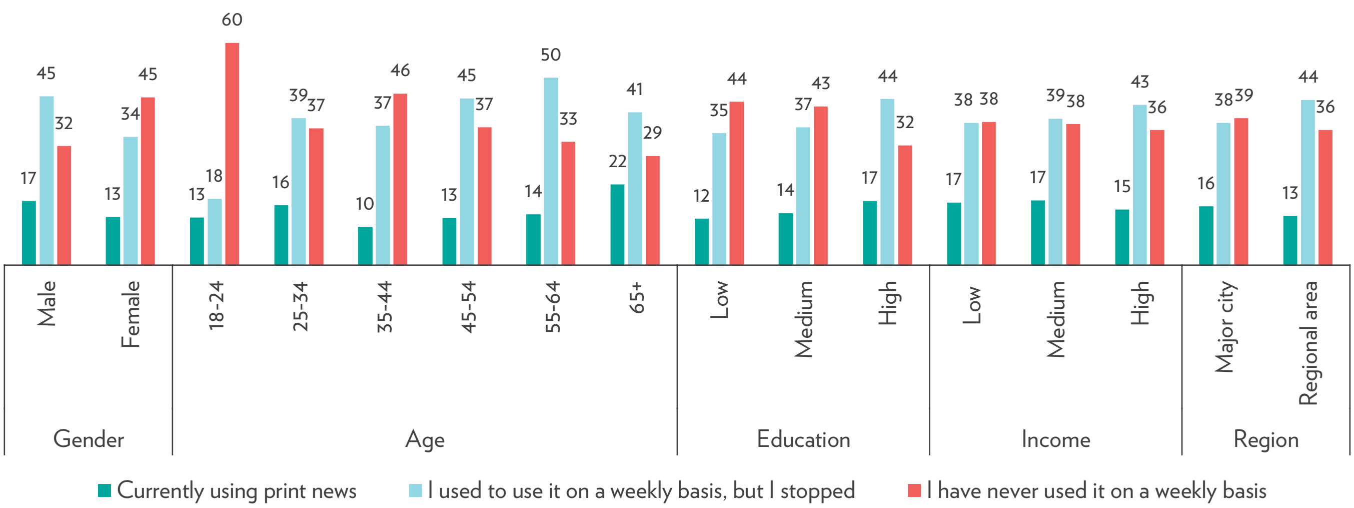


[Base: *n* = 2,025] *excluded 'don't know

60% of 18–24-year-olds have never read a printed newspaper

Those aged 18–24 (60%), women (45%), and those with low education (44%) are more likely to say they have never used newspapers in the past. Those aged 55–64 (50%), men (45%), people with high education (44%) and income (43%), and live in the regions (44%) are more likely to say they have getting news from printed newspapers (see **figure 2.4**).

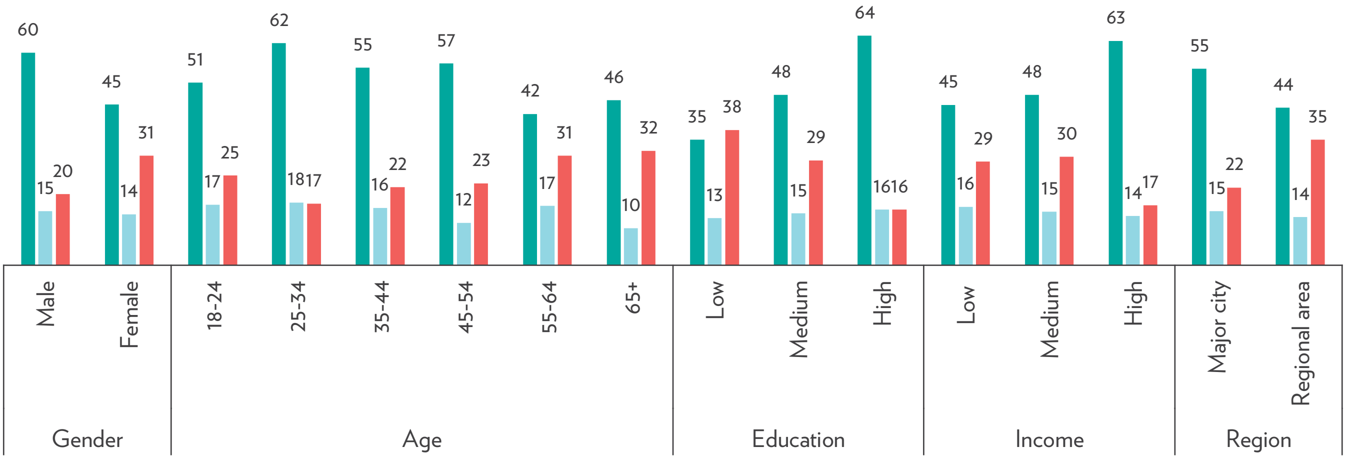
Figure 2.4: Change in the use of newspapers by demographics (%)



[Base: *n* = 2,025] *excluded 'don't know

In contrast to traditional news media, online news habits show a slightly different pattern. Those who are typically traditional news users are more likely to say they have never used online news: regional consumers (35%), 65+ (32%), low (29%) or medium income (30%), and low education (38%). Compared to traditional news media, people are less likely to say they have stopped using online news, indicating that there is room for growth in this newer platform for news (see **figure 2.5**).

Figure 2.5: Change in the use of online news websites by demographics (%)

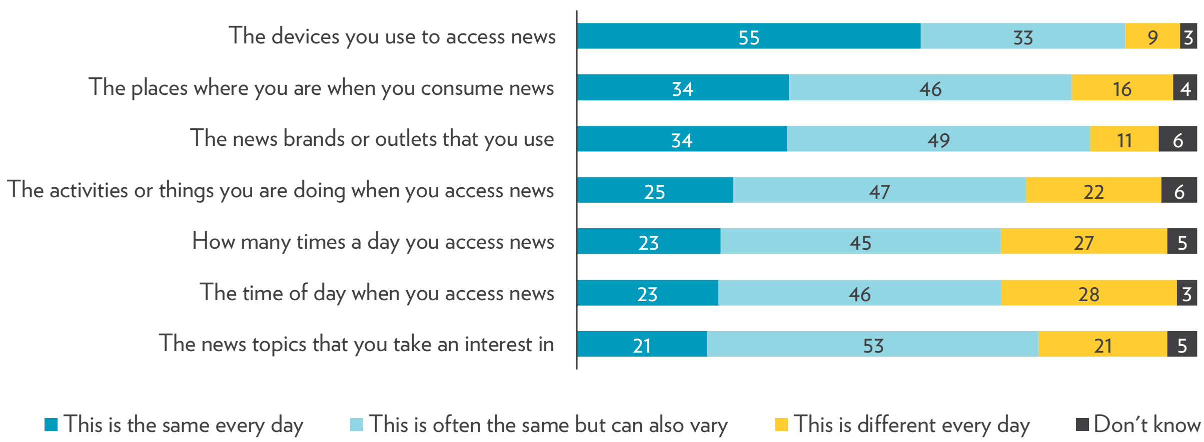


[Base: *n* = 2,025] *excluded 'don't know

When, where, what are relatively stable

We asked respondents about their news consumption habits. The findings show a relatively stable and consistent way of consuming news. The majority (55%) report using the same device to access news every day. About one third (34%) of news consumers get their news from the same place every day and from the same news brands (34%). The time of day (23%), frequency (23%), and news topics (21%) are less likely to be as consistent (see **figure 2.6**).

Figure 2.6: News habits (%)

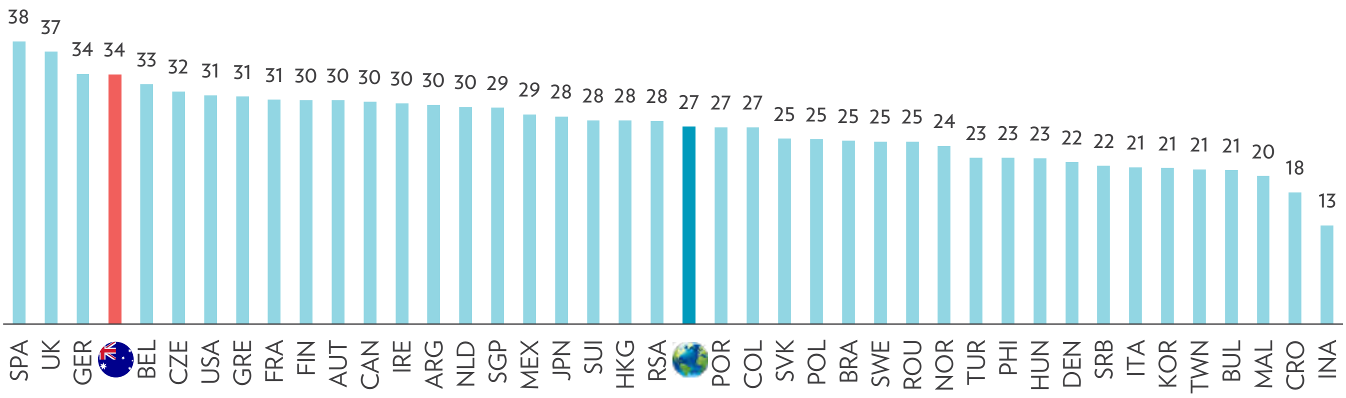


[Q1_habits] Thinking about your news habits, for each of the following, please indicate which option best applies to you. [Base: *n* = 1,941, those who did not access news on any of the platforms in Q3 were excluded]

Australia is among the highest globally in brand loyalty

Australians (34%) are more likely than the global average (27%) to stick with the same news brands, similar to Germany. Only Spain (38%) and the UK (37%) had a higher percentage of respondents saying they use the same news brands or outlets every day (see **figure 2.7**).

Figure 2.7: News brands that are the same every day by country (%)



[Base: *n* = 77,901]

A distinct generational gap emerges in the times of day people choose to access news; older people are more likely to access news at the same time every day (65+, 32% vs. 25–34s, 15%). A similar proportion of men (24%) and women (23%) say they access news at the same time every day. However, more women (33%) than men (26%) say they tend to access news at different times (see **figure 2.8**).

Figure 2.8: Time of day when you access news by age and gender (%)

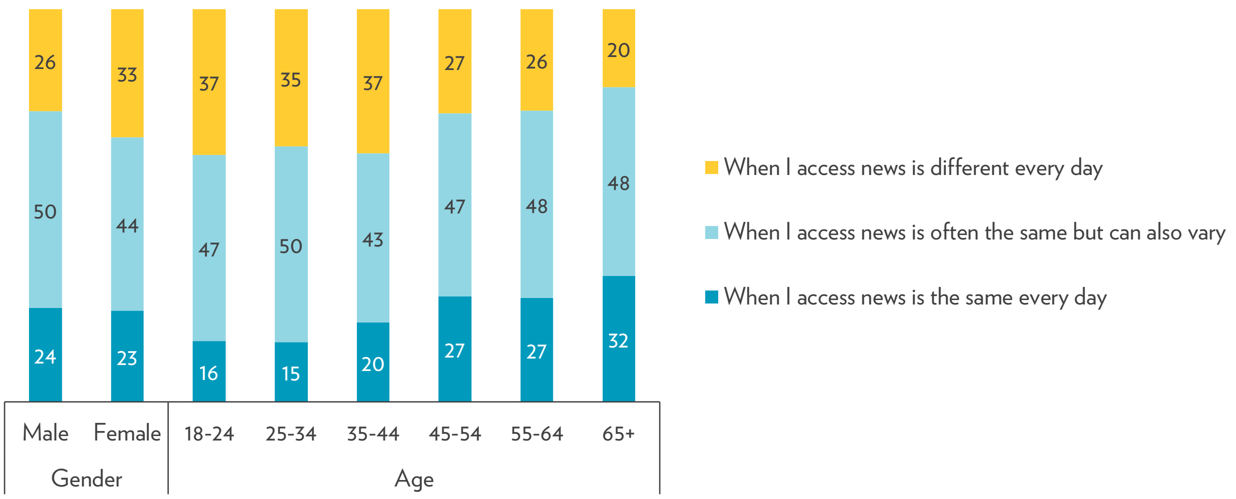
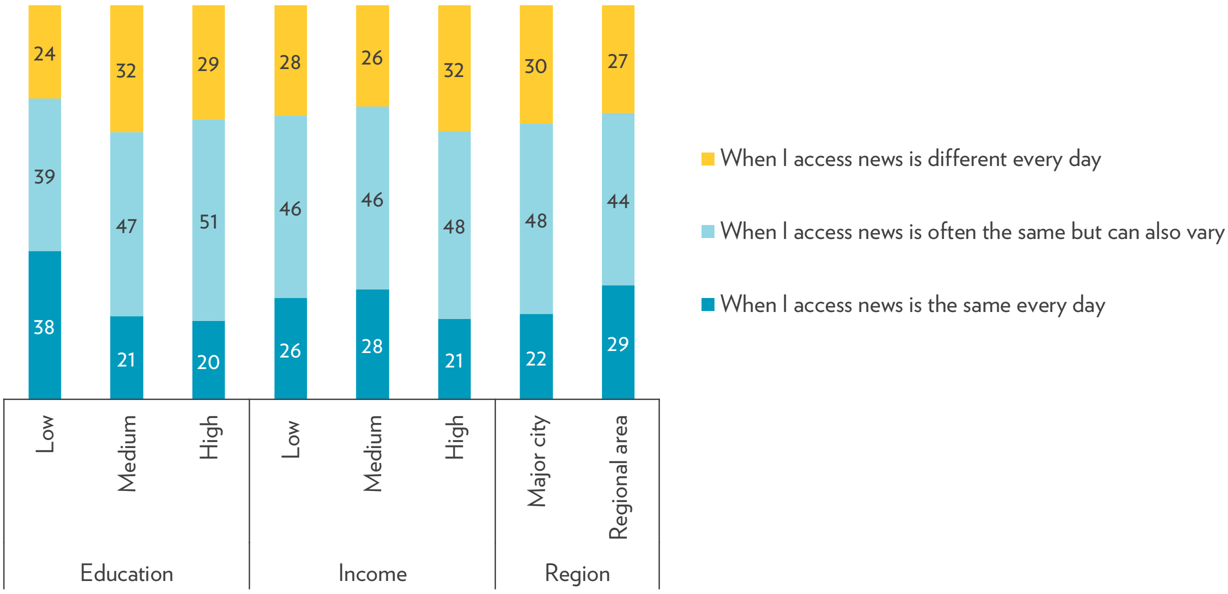


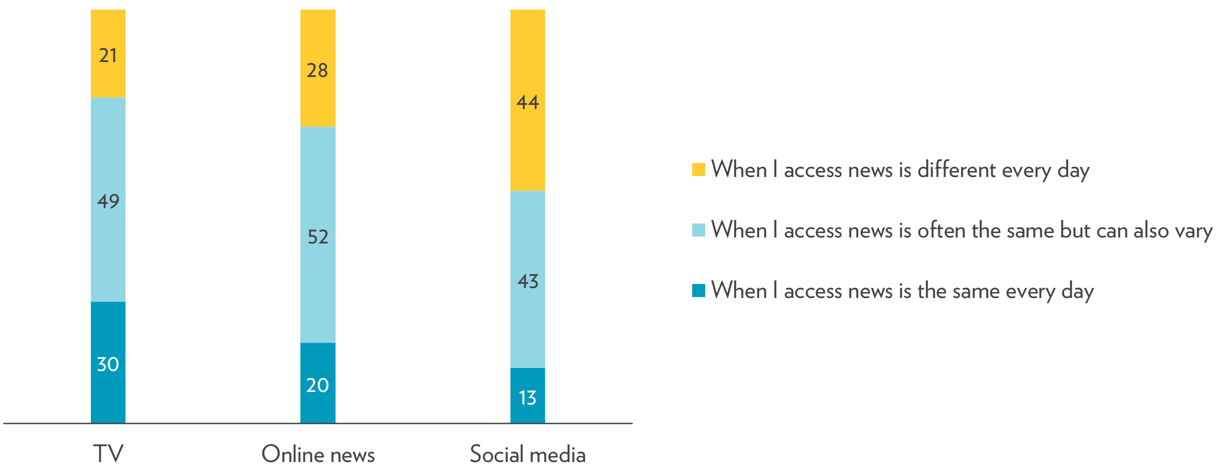
Figure 2.9 shows that those with low education (38%) are more likely to access news at the same time every day compared to those with medium (21%) or high education (20%). Education appears to be a bigger factor than either income or location, although regional news users (29%) do access news at the same time each day significantly more than city dwellers (22%).

Figure 2.9: Time of day when you access news by education, income and region (%)



Those who mainly use TV (30%) are more likely to say they access news every day at the same time, compared to those who mainly use online news (20%) or social media (13%). In contrast, those who say their main source of news is social media are much more likely than TV or online news users to access news at different times every day (44%), indicating they tend to encounter news incidentally rather than through routine habits (see **figure 2.10**).

Figure 2.10: Time of day when you access news by main source of news (%)



Almost half of 65+ use the same news brands every day

Older news consumers are more likely to use the same brands every day: 40% of 55–64s, and 47% of 65+. Younger generations are less likely to consistently use the same brands (see **figure 2.11**). These generations are more likely to get their news from multiple brands (see **figure 5.19** in **Chapter 5**).

Figure 2.11: Variety of news brands used by gender and age (%)

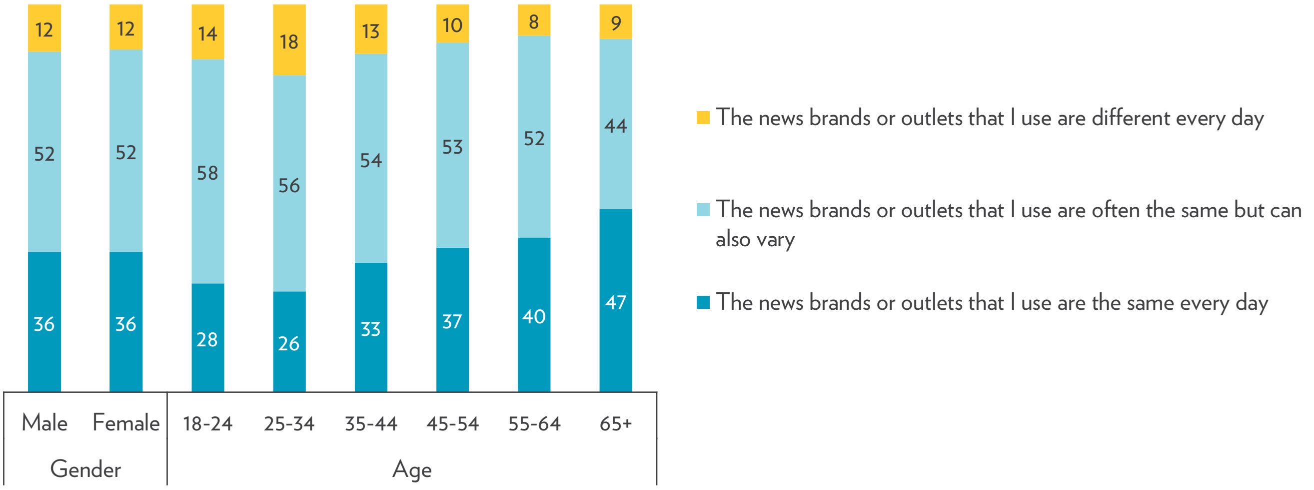
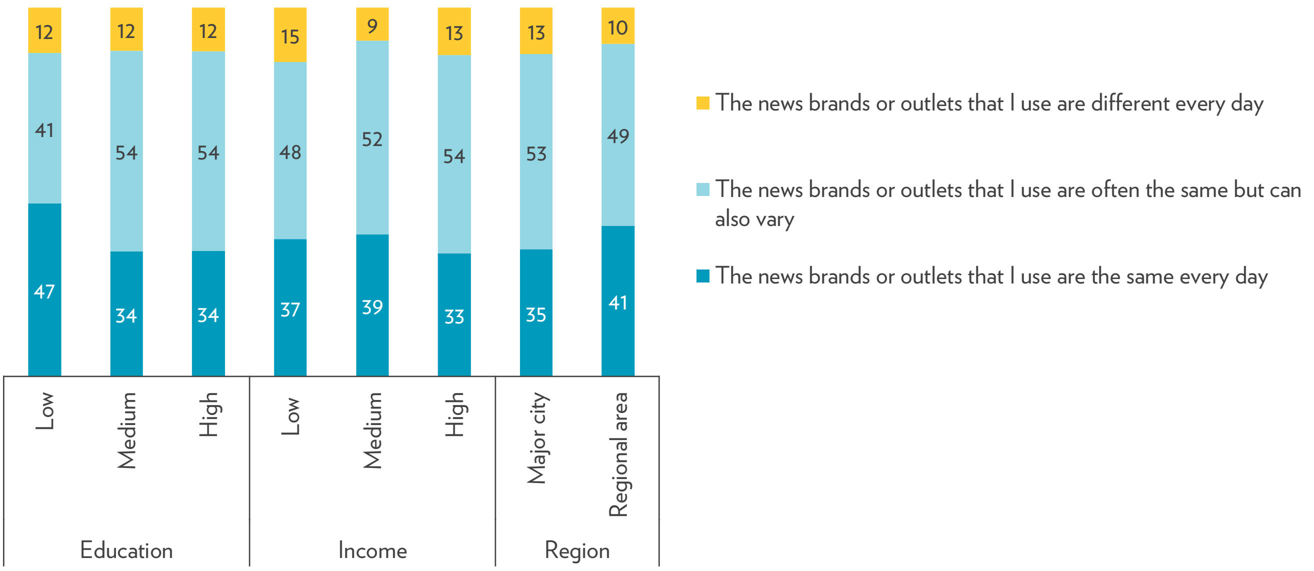


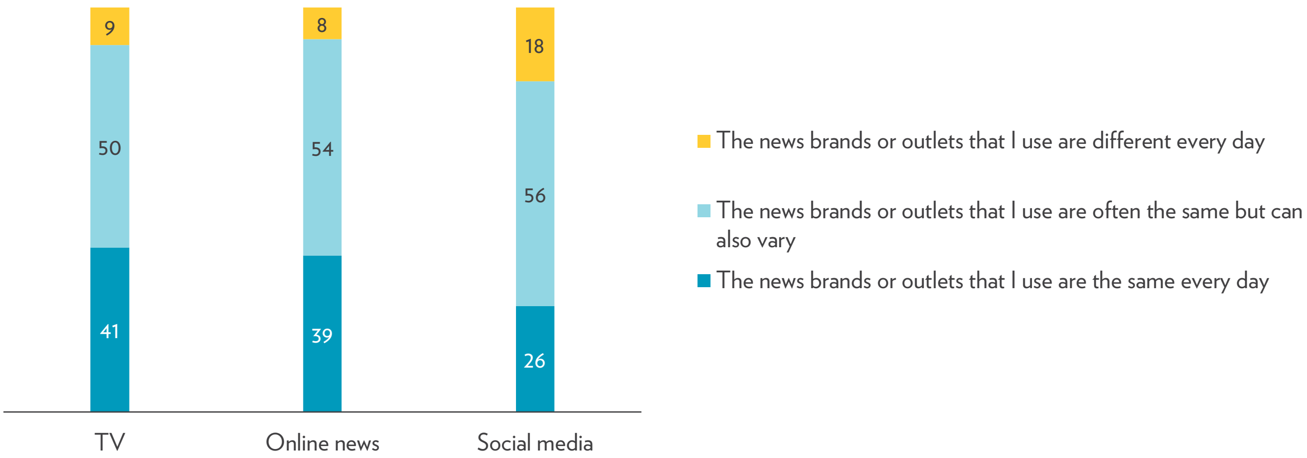
Figure 2.12 shows that consumers with low levels of education (47%) are more likely to use the same news brands every day than those with medium (34%) and high (34%) levels of education. Regional consumers (41%) are also more likely to use the same brands than city dwellers (35%).

Figure 2.12: Variety of news brands used by education, income and region (%)



There is also little difference in brand loyalty between consumers who get their news from TV (41%) and those who access it online (39%), but social media users are less likely to show loyalty to the same brands (26%). One in five (18%) among those whose main source of news is social media tend to access different news brands or outlets everyday (see **figure 2.13**).

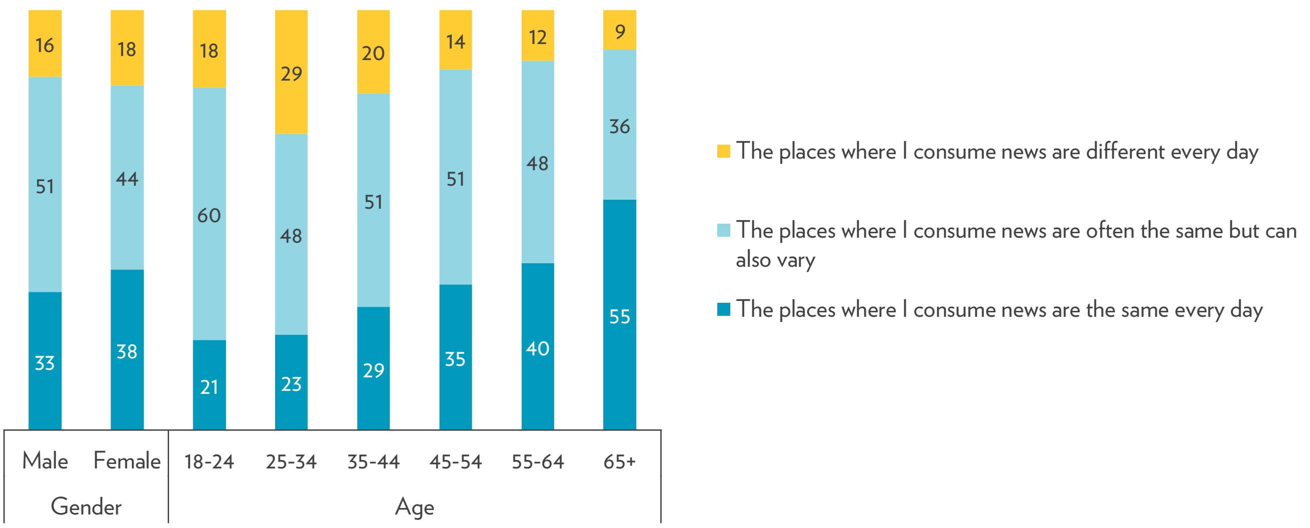
Figure 2.13: Variety of news brands used by main source of news (%)



Younger news consumers are not tied to a particular location when consuming news

The older consumers are, the more they access news in the same places every day. More than half (55%) of those aged 65+ say they access news in the same place every day. This figure drops to 21% among 18–24s. Women (38%) are more likely than men (33%) to report consuming news in the same location every day (see **figure 2.14**).

Figure 2.14: Change in places you access news by gender and age (%)

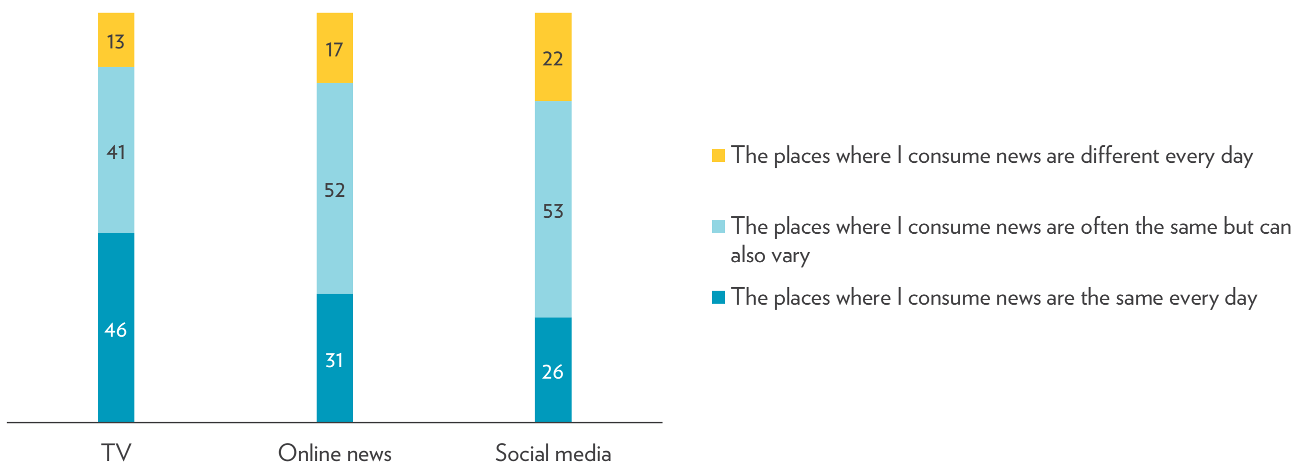


Those with low (48%) and medium education (37%) are more consistent in where they access news every day compared to those with high education (29%). A similar trend exists in income groups with low (41%) and medium (41%) income earners more likely than high income earners (30%) to access news in the same place every day. Those in regional areas (43%) tend to be more consistent compared to those living in major cities (33%) (see **figure 2.15**).

Figure 2.15: Change in places you access news by education, income and region (%)

Those whose main source of news is social media (26%) are less likely to say they consume news at a designated location, compared to TV news users (46%) and online news users (31%) (see **figure 2.16**).

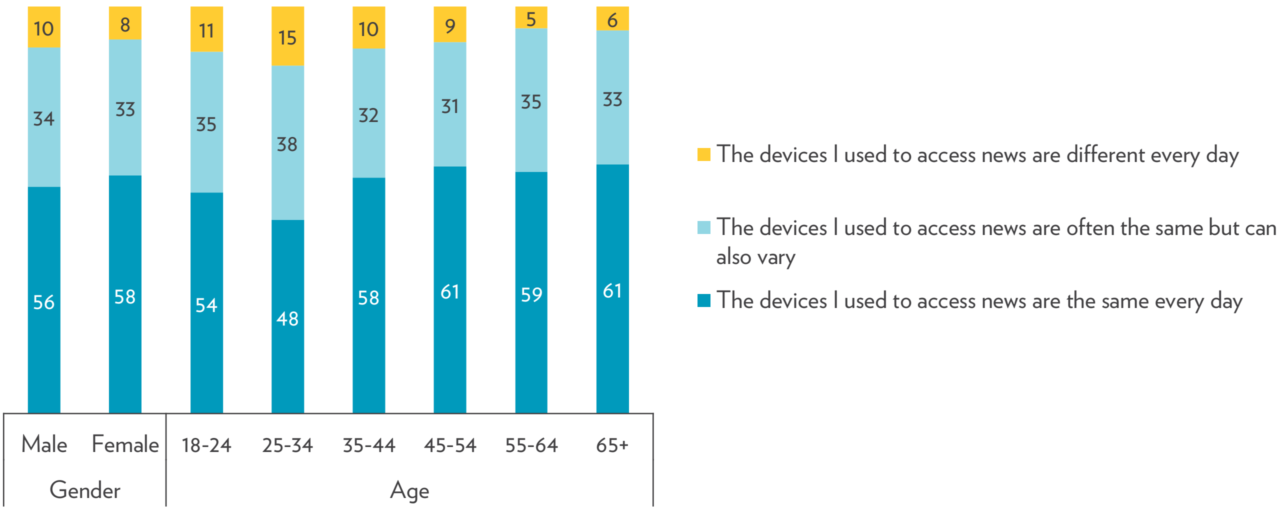
Figure 2.16: Change in places you access news by main source of news (%)



Younger people are more likely to use multiple devices to get news

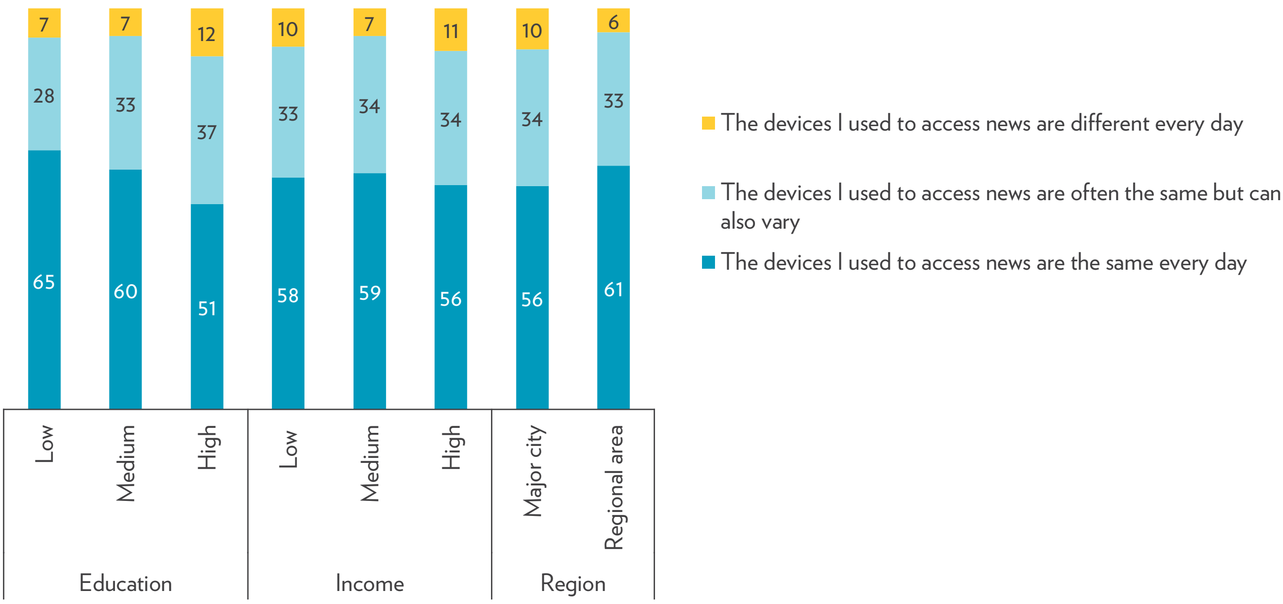
There is very little difference between how men and women report using devices. Older news consumers, particularly those aged 45 and over, say they use the same device to access news. The 25–34 age group (15%) reports using different devices everyday significantly more than any other age groups (see **figure 2.17**). This is possibly related to the fact that this cohort is more likely to get their news from multiple devices (see **Chapter 5**).

Figure 2.17: Difference in devices you access news with by gender and age (%)



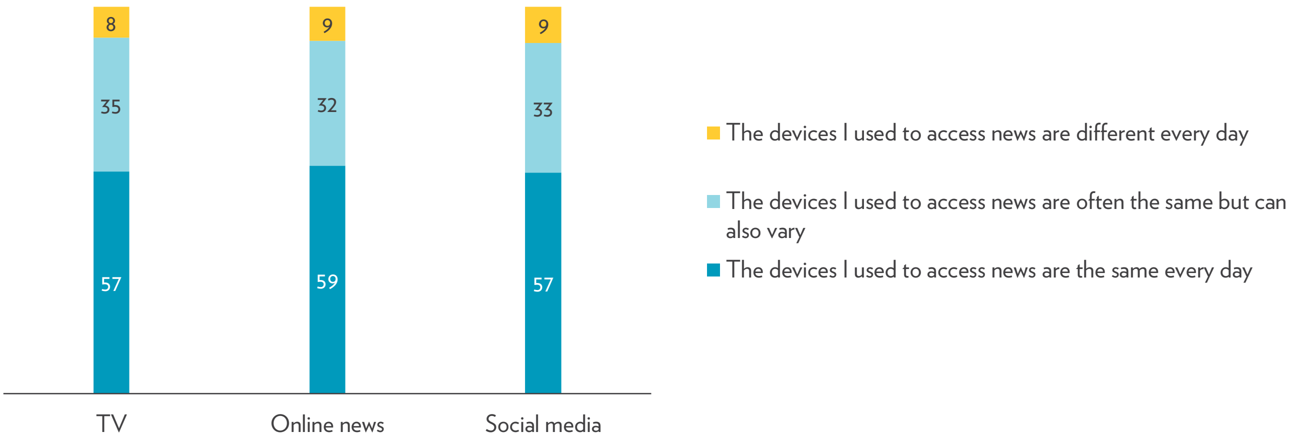
A lower percentage of those with high education say they use the same device to access news every day (51%) than those with medium (60%) or low (65%) levels of education. A similar pattern can be seen between city (56%) and regional (61%) news consumers (see **figure 2.18**).

Figure 2.18: Difference in devices you access news with by education, income and region (%)



However, as **figure 2.19** shows, there is very little difference in reported habits around device use between those who nominate TV news (57%), online news (59%) and social media platforms (57%) as their main sources for accessing news.

Figure 2.19: Difference in devices you access news with by main source of news (%)

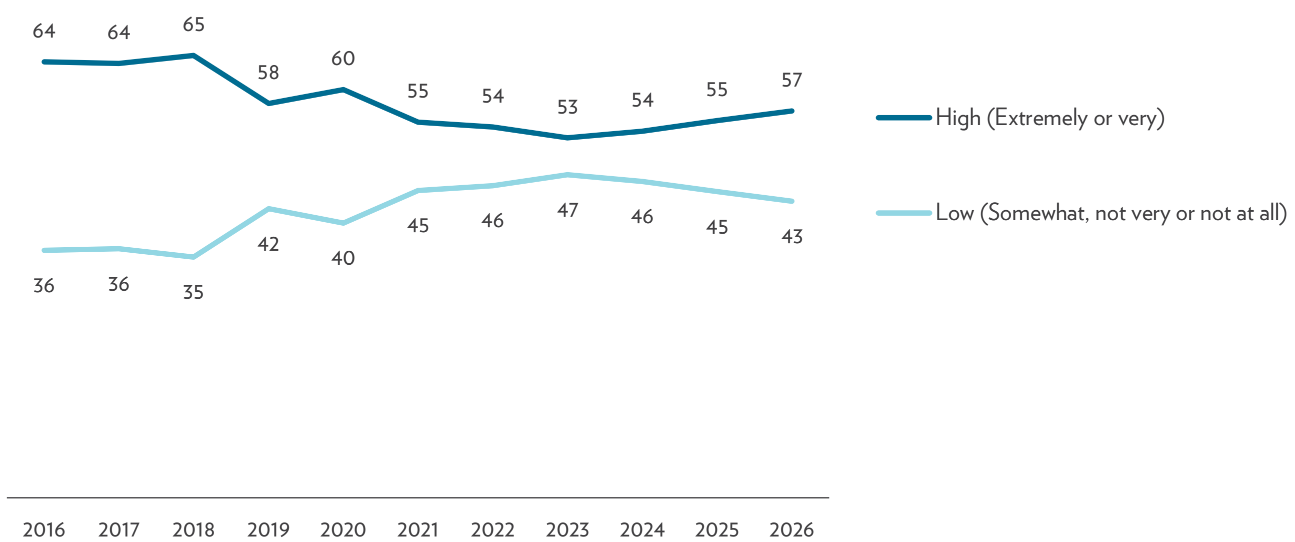


NEWS INTEREST AND AVOIDANCE

Australians regain interest in news

More than half of respondents say they are extremely or very interested in news. This year, 57% of Australian respondents say they are interested in national, international, regional/local news or other topical events accessed via any platform (see **figure 2.20**).

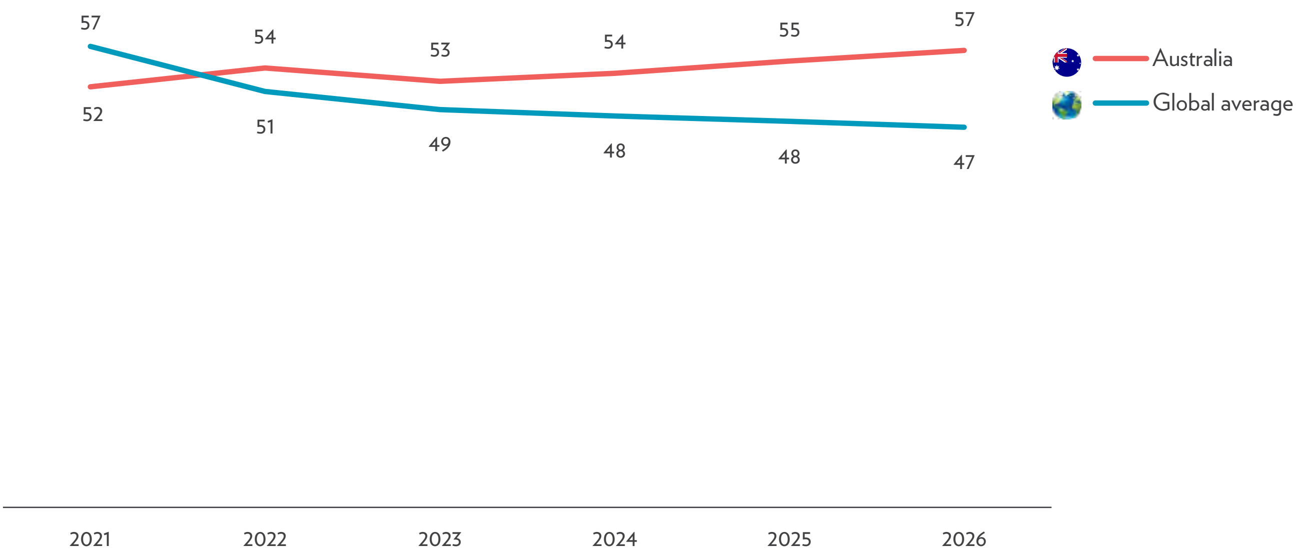
Figure 2.20: News interest 2016–2026 (%)



[Q1c] How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news? [Base: *n* = 1,896] * Excludes those who say 'don't know' and those who are very low/non news users from Q1b_NEW. From Q1b: By news we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper or online).

Globally, the proportion of those who say they are interested in news has been declining. This was also the case in Australia until recently, when we have started to see an increase in the proportion of people who say they have high interest in news. This year, the level of high interest in news in Australia sits 10 percentage points above the global average (see **figure 2.21**).

Figure 2.21: Interest in news by Australia vs. global 2021–2026 (%)

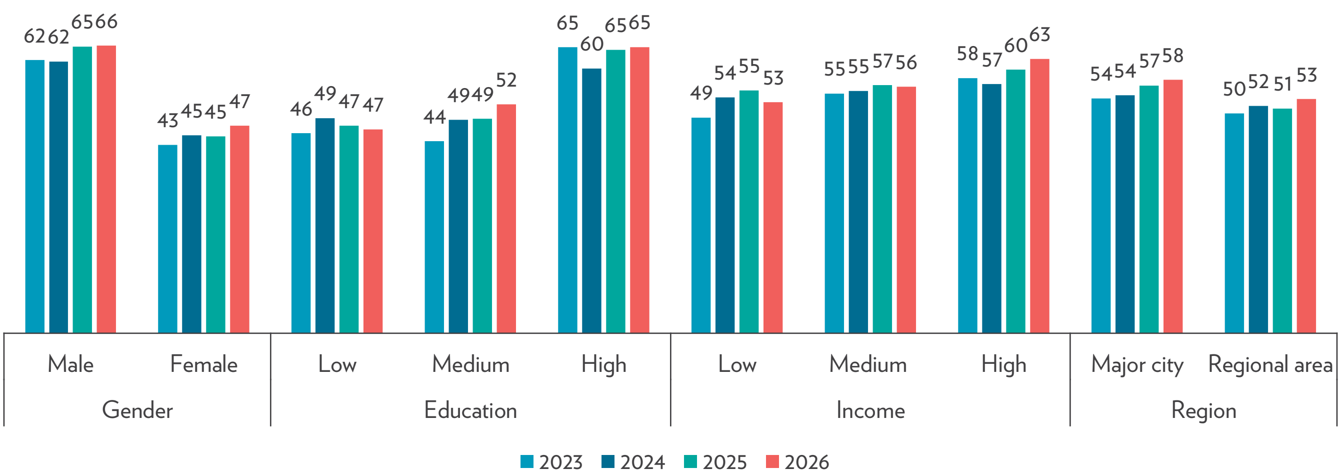


[Base: 2021 = 65,544; 2022 = 69,104; 2023 = 68,826; 2024 = 67,344; 2025 = 78,709; 2026 = 78,843] * Excludes those who say 'don't know' and those who are very low/non news users from Q1b_NEW.

Women's interest in news continues to grow

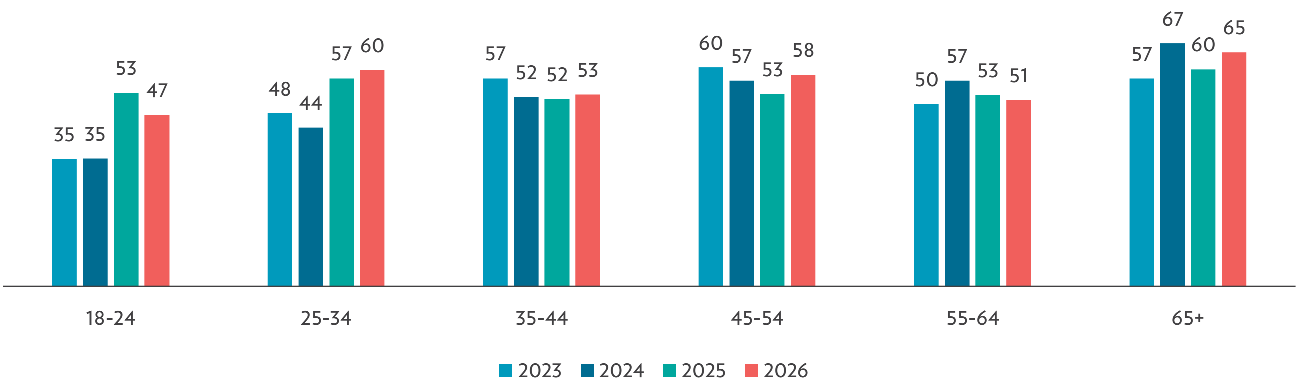
In general, men (66%) are still more interested in news than women (47%). Those with high education (65%) and high income (63%), and who live in major cities (58%), are also more interested in news than other groups. The slight uptick in news interest since 2023 seems to be driven by those typically with low interest in news such as women and young people. Since 2023, the proportion of women (47%) who say they are interested has increased by four percentage points. The level of interest in news among participants with medium education (52%; +8) and low income (53%; +4) has also increased (see **figure 2.22**).

Figure 2.22: News interest by demographics 2023–2026 (%)



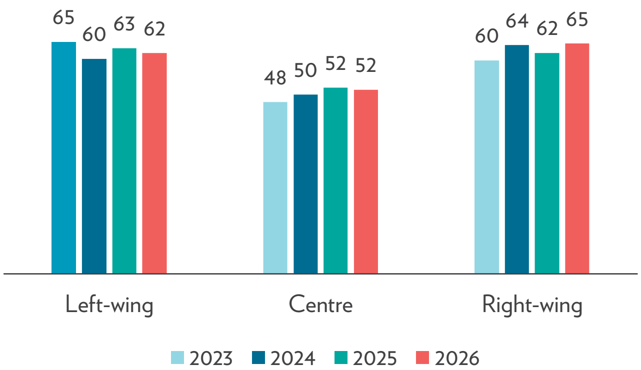
Similarly, 18–24-year-olds (47%; +12) and 25–34-year-olds (60%; +12) have increased their interest in news since 2023. This has brought younger cohorts, particularly 25–34-year-olds, much more in line with older ones in terms of news interest (see **figure 2.23**)

Figure 2.23: News interest by age 2023–2026 (%)



News interest
18–24s **47%**
25–34s **60%**

Figure 2.24: News interest by political orientation 2023–2026 (%)

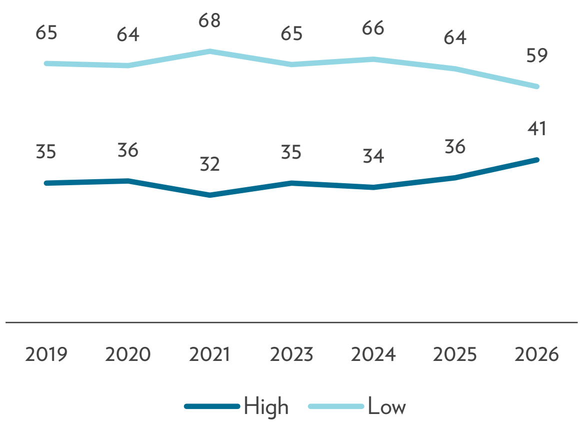


Both left- and right-wing respondents continue to be more likely to say they are interested in news than those who identify with the centre of politics. However, in recent years there has been a slight increase in interest among centre respondents (see **figure 2.24**).

Interest in politics among women and young people has increased

We ask respondents how interested, if at all, they are in politics. Since 2024, the number of respondents who say they are interested in politics has increased, reaching 41% this year (see **figure 2.25**).

Figure 2.25: Interest in politics 2019–2026 (%)

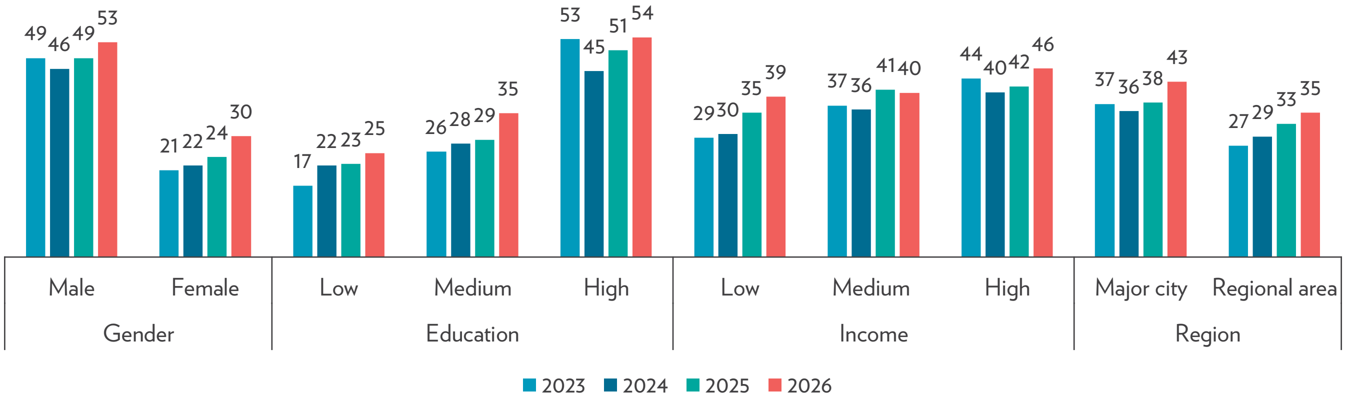


Interest in *politics*
2019-2026 ↑ **6pp**

[Q2_new2018] How interested, if at all, would you say you are in _politics_? High = Extremely/very interested; Low = Somewhat, not very or not at all interested. [Base: *n* = 2,012] * Excludes those who say 'don't know'. This question was not asked in 2022.

This year 53% of men say they are interested in politics compared to 30% of women. The increase in political interest has been most notable among women (30%; +9 since 2023), those with low (25%; +8) or medium (35%; +9) education, those with low incomes (39%; +10), and regional news consumers (35%; +8). This is interesting because these groups typically have lower interest in politics (see **figure 2.26**).

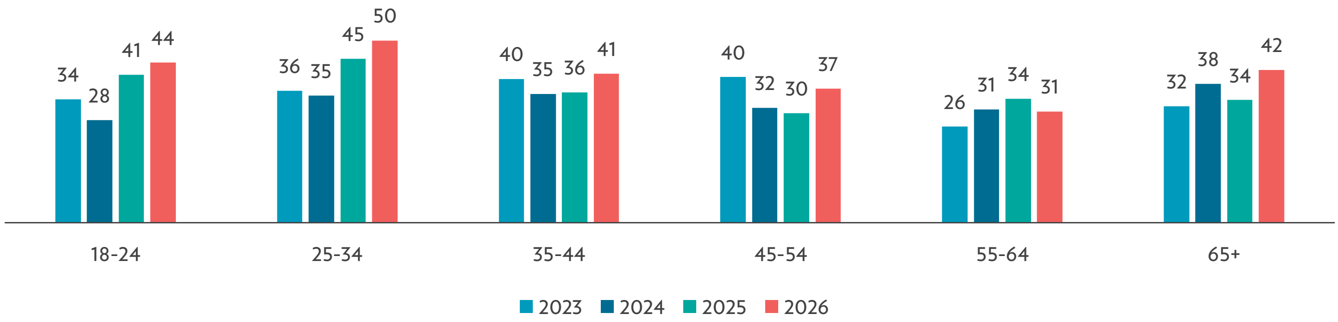
Figure 2.26: Interest in politics by demographics 2023–2026 (%)



25–34-year-olds have the highest interest in politics

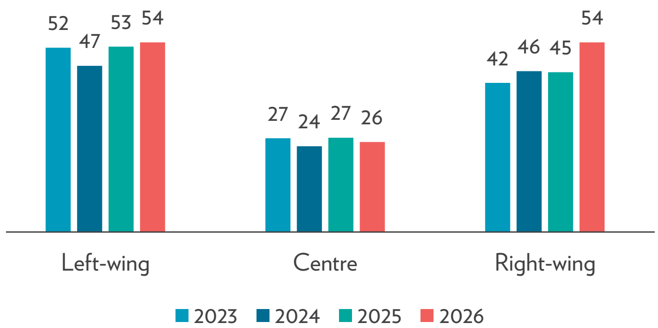
As of this year, 25–34-year-olds (50%) have the highest level of interest in politics, and this has increased by 14 percentage points since 2023. Interest in politics has increased substantially among 18–24-year-olds as well, rising from 34% in 2023 to 44% this year. Older respondents have not declined in their levels of interest, with those 65+ increasing by 10 percentage points since 2023. Notably since last year, those U35 have a higher interest in politics compared to 35+ (see **figure 2.27**).

Figure 2.27: Interest in politics by age 2023–2026 (%)



Centre oriented respondents (26%) are much less interested in politics compared to left- or right-wing respondents (54%). This year, the proportion of right-wing respondents who say they are interested in politics has risen significantly by nine percentage points to 54% (see **figure 2.28**).

Figure 2.28: Interest in politics by political orientation 2023–2026 (%)

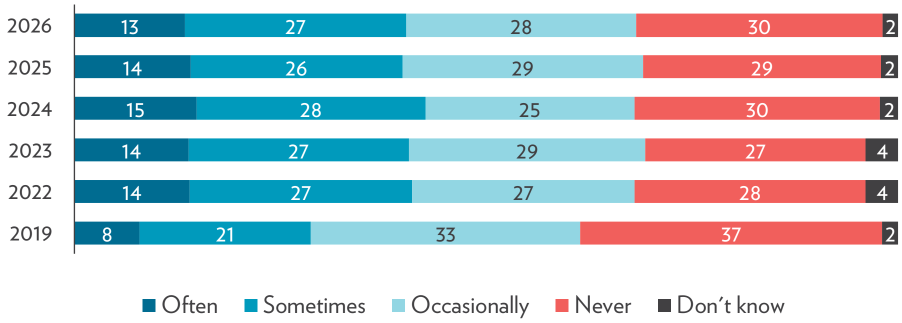


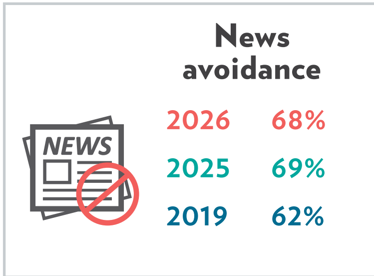
News avoidance remains high

There was a substantial increase in news avoidance between 2019 and 2022 and remains high (68%) with very little changes since then (see **figure 2.29**).

Australia is slightly below the global average (71%) when it comes to news avoidance (3pp gap). Japan has the lowest proportion of respondents saying they avoid news (41%), Croatia (87%) has the highest (see **figure 2.30**).

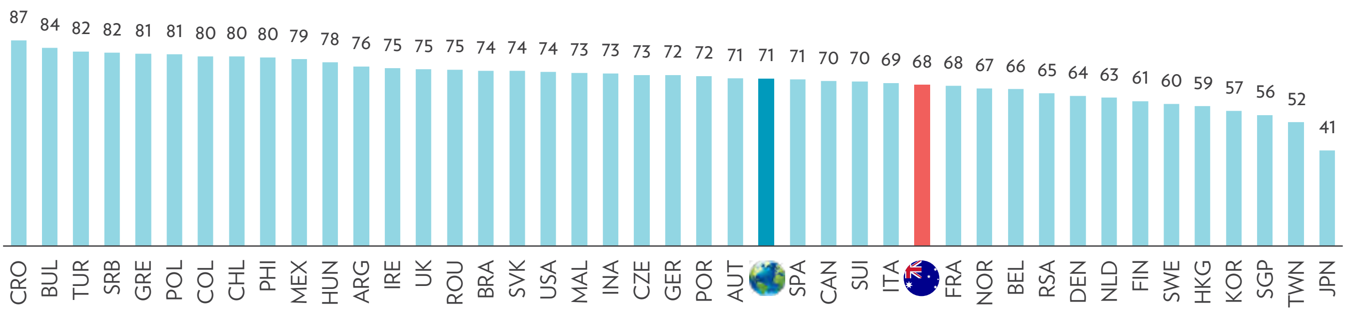
Figure 2.29: News avoidance 2019–2026 (%)





[Q1di_2017] Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid news these days? [Base: *n* = 2,025]

Figure 2.30: News avoidance by country (%)

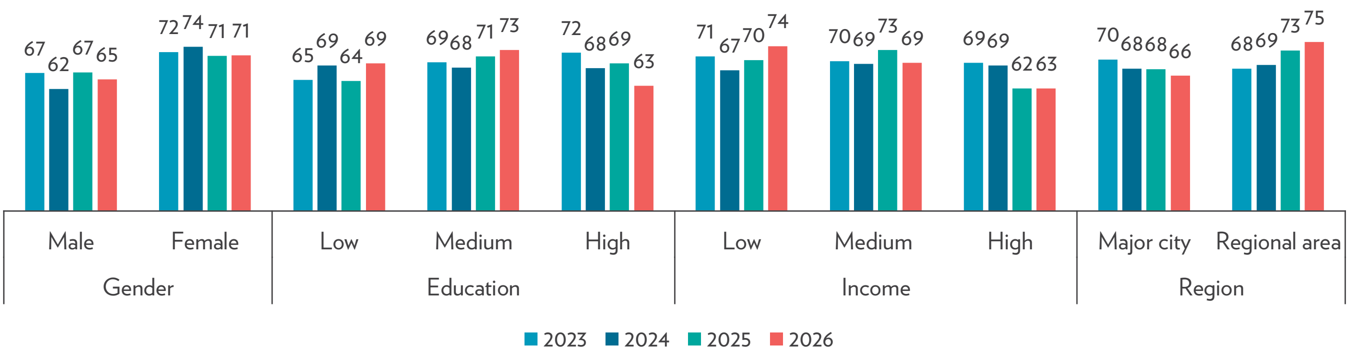


[Base: *n* = 85,390]

As findings over the last four years have consistently shown, women (71%) are more likely to avoid news then men (65%). Both men and women's avoidance have not changed much since last year. News avoidance has increased for news consumers with low education (69%, +5) but has dropped among those with high education (63%; -6).

High income earners also report lower rates of news avoidance (63%) than both low (74%) and medium income (69%) respondents. Among low income earners, there has been a four percentage point increase in levels of news avoidance, while medium income earners have seen a four percentage point drop on its 2025 level (see **figure 2.31**).

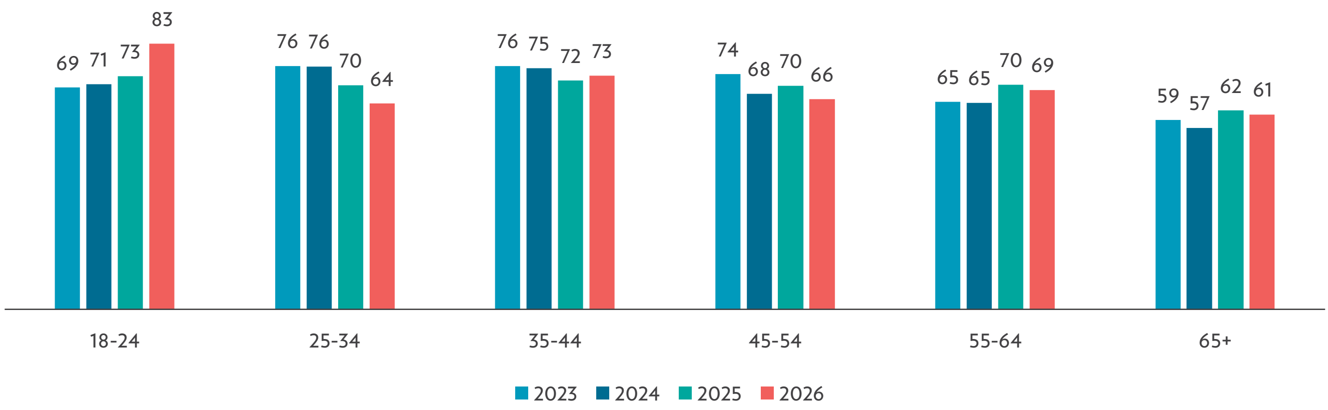
Figure 2.31: News avoidance by demographics 2023–2026 (% often/sometimes/occasionally)



Avoidance grows among 18–24s

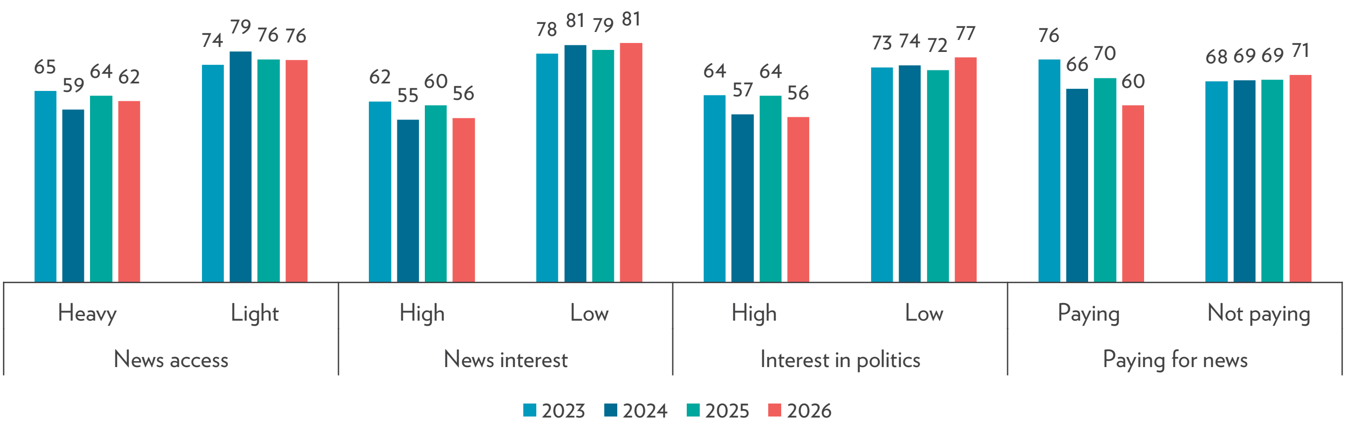
Four in five consumers aged 18–24 avoid news (83%) and this is a 10 percentage point increase since last year. While this cohort has increased its news consumption (see Chapter 5), it also means they want to turn away from news once in a while. By contrast, the 25–34 age group (64%) shows a six percentage point drop since 2025 (see **figure 2.32**).

Figure 2.32: News avoidance by age 2023–2026 (% often/sometimes/occasionally)



As would be expected, **figure 2.33** shows that heavy news consumers and those with a strong interest in news and politics continue to avoid news less than light consumers, and those with low interest in news and politics. In contrast to 2025 findings, however, there is a sharp distinction between consumers who pay compared to those who do not in 2026, following a 10 percentage point drop in news avoidance among those who pay for news.

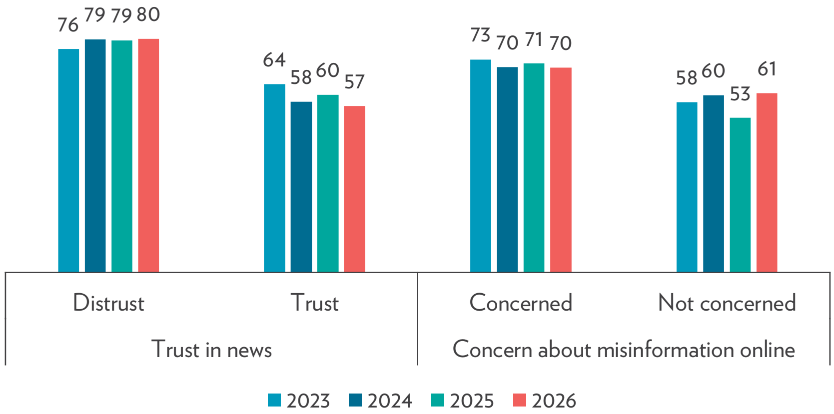
Figure 2.33: News avoidance by news access, news interest, interest in politics and paying for news 2023–2026 (% often/sometimes/occasionally)



Concern about misinformation is associated with news avoidance

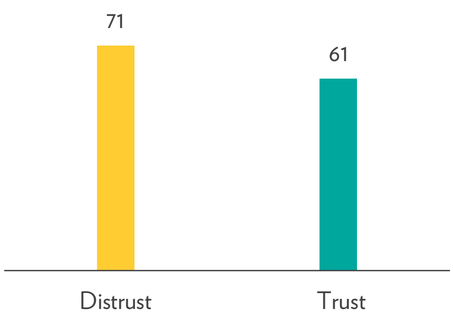
Those who distrust news (80%) and those concerned about misinformation (70%) are more likely to avoid news compared with those who trust news (57%) and are not concerned about misinformation (61%) (see **figure 2.34**).

Figure 2.34: News avoidance by trust in news and concern about misinformation online 2023–2026 (% often/sometimes/occasionally)



When comparing those who say they trust news on social media to those who do not, we can see a wide gap in their news avoidance. Those who distrust news found on social media are much more likely to avoid news (71%) compared to those who trust news on social media (61%) (see **figure 2.35**).

Figure 2.35: News avoidance by trust in news on social media (% often/sometimes/occasionally)



SUMMARY

Audiences' news routines have dramatically shifted in the online environment, where audiences access news from a variety of sources and platforms, both intentionally and incidentally, often throughout the day.

The data reveal the extent to which audiences have transitioned to new media over their lifetimes. Many respondents say they used to access news on radio and in newspapers but stopped, with only small proportions still using these mediums compared to television and online news. These changes are clearly generational, with more than half of people aged 18–24 saying they have never used radio or newspapers for news on a weekly basis.

Just as the mediums people use for news have changed over their lives, day to day news habits seem to be changing as well. This year we asked respondents a range of questions about how, where and when they choose to access news, as well as the variety of topics they access every day. Overall, news consumers are more consistent with the devices, places and brands that they use to access news, compared to the timing of their news consumption and the variety of topics they are interested in.

Brand loyalty appears to be stronger among older respondents, with almost half of those aged 65 and older saying they use the exact same news brands every day. Young people are less consistent. TV and online news users tend be more likely to stick to the same brands every day compared to those who rely on social media for news.

This year, young people have increased both their news consumption and levels of interest in news and politics. While older audiences traditionally expressed higher levels of interest in politics than young people, they are now roughly even in their levels of interest.

Clearly, younger people's news habits are adaptive and dynamic with regards to time, place, brands and devices for news, and it is likely these habits may change further as new technologies such as generative AI chatbots become more popular as sources of news.

In other parts of this report, we have found that news consumption increased among younger generations. Their avoidance also increased, suggesting their concern about false and misleading misinformation online is rising. Young people's concern about misinformation also grew the most (see **Chapter 7**).

Overall, the findings from this chapter suggest that news organisations may have a difficult time predicting how young people's news consumption patterns will change going forward.

COMMENTARY

OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM

Dave Earley, Audience Editor, Guardian Australia

In preparing for this year's *Digital News Report: Australia*, I was reminded of recurring themes over the years that have worried the news industry, particularly increasing news avoidance and falling interest in news. Instead, they can take heart from some of this year's report numbers.

One exceptionally positive indicator is that interest in news continues to rise in Australia, in relatively sharp contrast to the global average. Australians' interest in news was already three points higher than global interest in 2022, but it has risen since 2023 as global interest continued to fall.

At 57%, Australian interest in news is now a full 10pp higher than the global average. That Australian rise has been driven in large part by younger people.

Not only that, interest in politics is up across almost every age bracket and demographic, with the highest rise coming from women. Those two rises, along with the significant increase in news consumption, stand in stark contrast to, and seemingly at odds with, the simultaneous rise in declared news avoidance among these cohorts. Yes, young people are increasingly avoiding TV, radio and newspaper news, but their news consumption continues to rise, largely on social media. This year, for the first time ever, Australians who came across news via social media overtook those who went directly to a news website as their main pathway to online news.

In the *Digital News Report's* 12 years, some of the 18–24 cohort have matured all the way into the 35–44-year-old bracket. They are rapidly carrying their news consumption patterns forward and, as ever, we must meet them where they are and in the ways they expect if we care about the future of news. Young Australians are discerning, invested in the topics that matter to them, and will only give their attention to voices they feel they can trust — whether they're new, legacy or traditional media or creators and influencers.

With this in mind, rather than avoiding news itself, news avoidance can partly be about avoiding the mediums and formats that are traditionally identified as 'news' — unappealing, hard to digest, in places that are difficult to navigate, and sometimes delivered in a way that feels out of step with the urgency of the multiple crises young people care about. In showing that young Australians have a growing interest in news and politics, and are increasing their volume of news consumption in varied ways, *Digital News Report: Australia 2026* reflects similar findings in other recent Reuters Institute reports and the Next Gen News reports, that have shown "younger audiences are not disengaged from news, but balance regular use with selective avoidance",[1] and are instead "disengaged from formats, products and institutional habits built for previous generations".[2]

With that tension between the simultaneous rise in interest in news and politics among young people and their reported news avoidance in mind, this year's findings are extremely positive for Australian news providers who are charting the path ahead.

Rather than focusing on potential audience decline in some areas or from some sources, I continue to hold great optimism for the future of journalism as the connective force for hope that it can be among different generations looking for actionable change as part of a community for good, wherever they find it.

[1] Germuska, J. et al (2026). *Next Gen News 2: Anticipating the audiences of 2030 and the strategies to meet them.* FT Strategies & Knight Lab. https://www.next-gen-news.com/next_gen_news_2_report.pdf

[2] McMullan, D. (2026). *Publishers rethink journalism for the creator era as young audiences reshape news habits.* INMA World Congress Blog. https://www.inma.org/blogs/world-congress/post.cfm/publishers-rethink-journalism-for-the-creator-era-as-young-audiences-reshape-news-habits

NEWS MOMENTS

11 December 2025 | Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Communications Minister Anika Wells meet with students in Canberra. In early December, Meta began the process of removing Australians under the age of 16 from Instagram, Facebook and Threads in preparation for the introduction of social media ban. The ban on children using social media in Australia is the first of its kind in the world, with Europe reportedly working on similar legislation to be introduced in the years to come.

Image by LUKAS COCH / AAP Image

3 GENERATIVE AI, DIGITAL PLATFORMS & NEWS

- Nearly one in ten Australians now use generative AI chatbots for news (9%, +3).
- Half (49%) of AI chatbot news consumers turn to them to follow up on news stories.
- AI news users value the chatbots' ability to aggregate, explain, and simplify news.
- Social media (37%) and AI chatbots (38%) have lower rates of click-through to news sources compared to search engines (45%).
- Users tend to click through search engines, social media and AI chatbots to get more details, but also click through AI chatbots to verify the news.

AI CHATBOTS FOR NEWS

Nearly one in ten Australians now use generative AI chatbots for news

The use of AI chatbots, such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity, for news is increasing steadily, reaching a total of 9% (+3). As **figure 3.1** shows, there has been an increase across most demographic groups, with AI news growing the most among major city residents (+5), widening the gap between city and regional audiences (+7pp gap).

Similar to 2025, AI news consumption remains higher among men (10%), young people (18–24: 16%; 25–34: 18%), those with high education (15%), high income earners (11%), and major city residents (11%) compared to their counterparts.

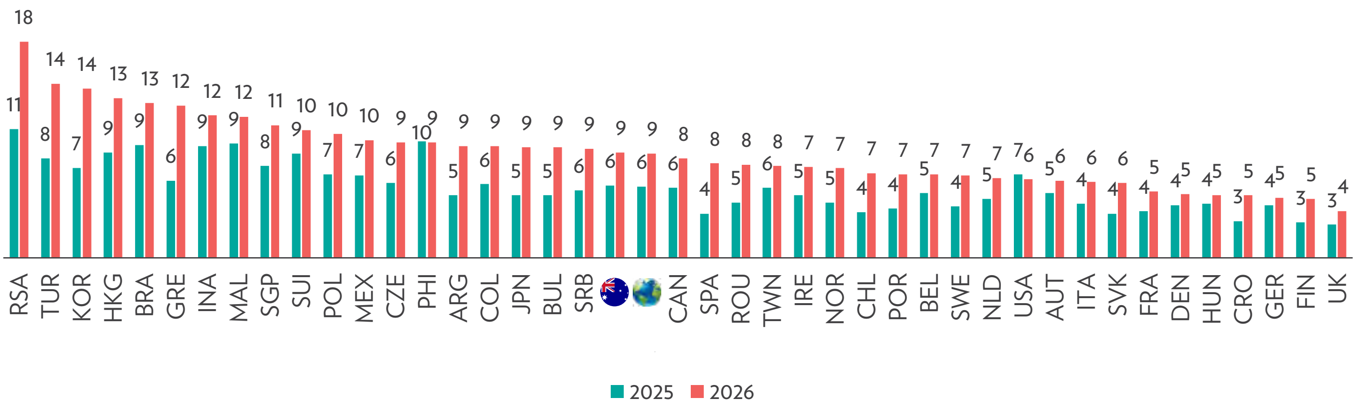
Figure 3.1: AI chatbots for news 2025–2026 (%)

[Q3] Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news? Generative AI chatbots to get news such as ChatGPT, Gemini, or Perplexity [Base: *n* = 2,025]

Globally, there has been a growth in AI chatbot use for news consumption. As in 2025, Australian's AI chatbot use remains on par with the global average (9%). South Africa (18%, +7), Turkey (14%, +6), and South Korea (14%, +7) are leading this trend, with strong growth since 2025.

Meanwhile, accessing news via AI chatbots remains very low in the UK (4%) and several European countries, including Finland, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Denmark, and France (all 5%), and have not changed much since 2025 (see **figure 3.2**).

Figure 3.2: AI chatbots for news by country 2025–2026 (%)

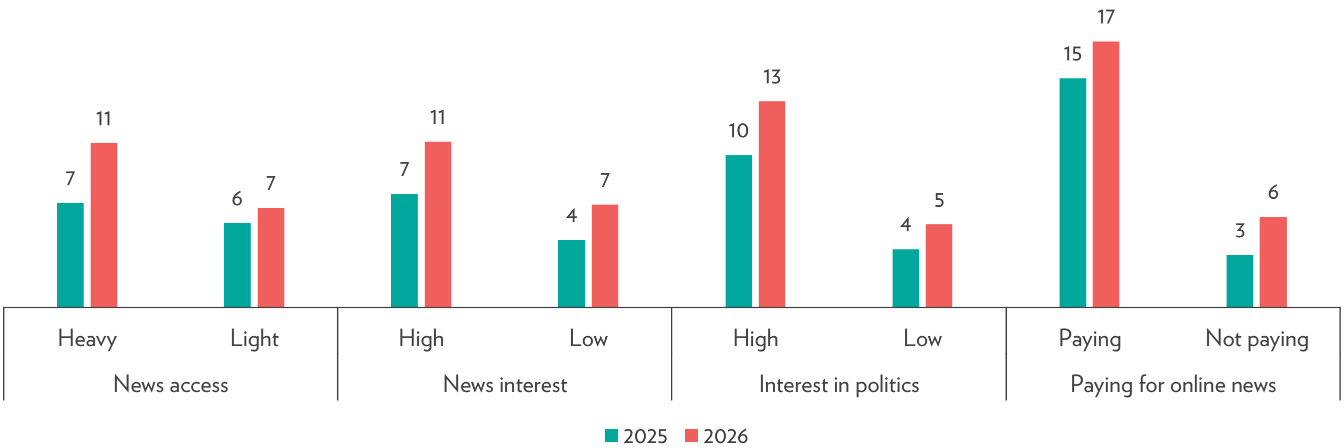


[Base: 2025 *n* = 84,923; 2026 *n* = 85,386]

AI chatbot use is highest among news payers

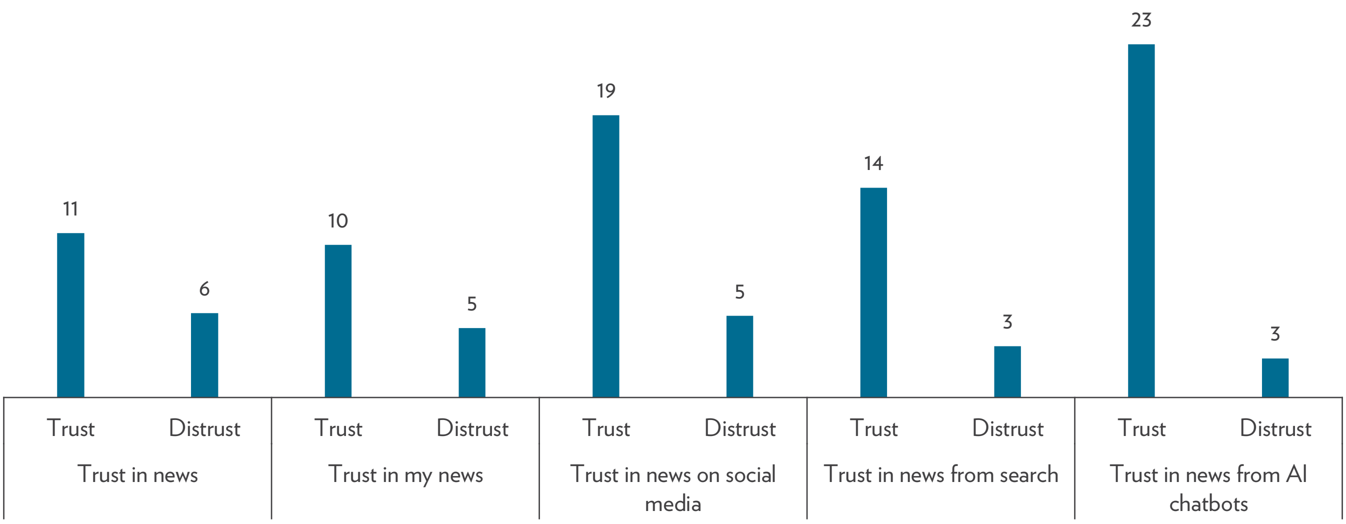
AI chatbot use for news is higher among those who are paying for online news (17%, +2), have high interest in politics (13%, +3) or news in general (11%, +4), and are heavy news consumers (11%, +4) (see **figure 3.3**).

Figure 3.3: AI chatbots for news by news access, news interest, interest in politics and paying for online news 2025–2026 (%)



The use of AI chatbots for news is considerably higher among those who trust news than those who distrust news. As **figure 3.4** illustrates, those who trust news from AI chatbots report the highest usage (23%), followed by those who trust news on social media (19%) and news from search engines (14%).

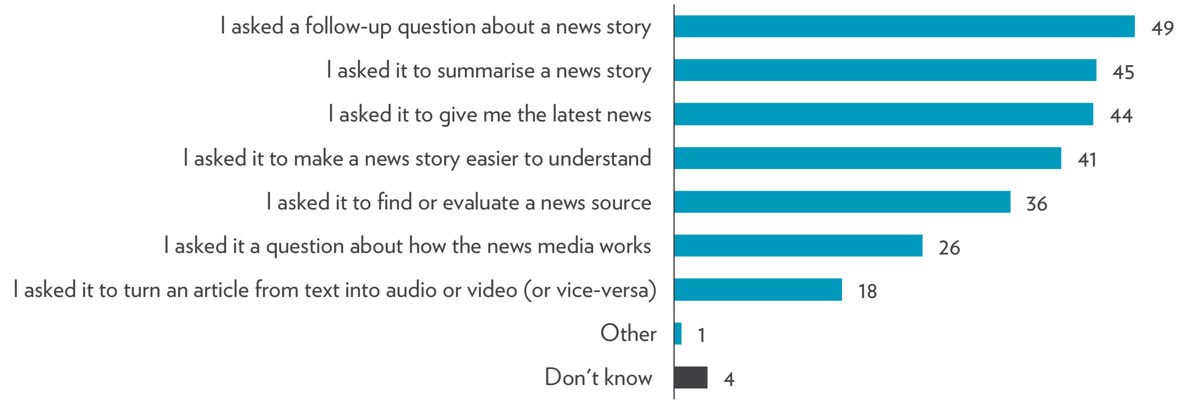
Figure 3.4: AI chatbot use by trust in news, trust in my news, trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots (%)



Nearly half of AI chatbot news users rely on the technology to follow up on news stories

We asked AI chatbot users how they use it to access news. As shown in **figure 3.5**, asking follow-up questions about a news story is the most common way AI chatbots are used (49%), followed by asking for news summaries (45%), for the latest news (44%), and making it easier to understand news (41%), showing that people are more likely to use AI chatbots to gain a better understanding of what is happening. More than a third of those who use AI chatbots for news asked it to find or evaluate a news source (36%), and 26% asked questions about how the news media works, indicating their media literacy needs.

Figure 3.5: How AI chatbot was used to access news (%)

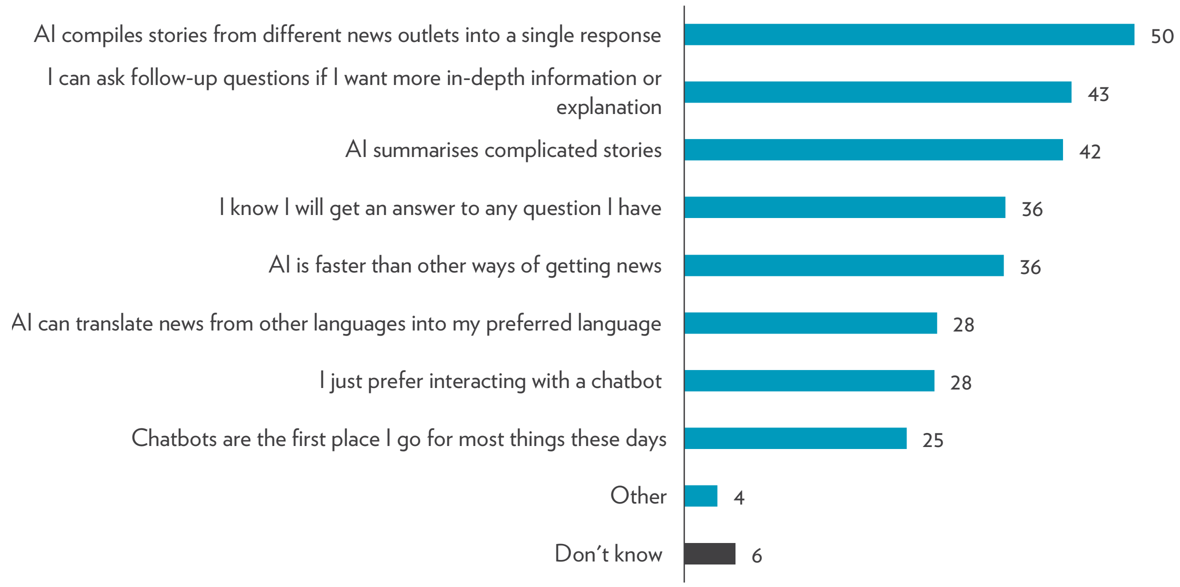


[Q_AI_newstype] You said you have used a generative AI chatbot (e.g. ChatGPT) for getting news in the last week... Which, if any, of the following did you do? Please select all that apply. (If any of your answer options are not listed below, please type them in the 'Other' box.) [Base: *n* = 174]

Users value AI chatbots' ability to aggregate, explain, and simplify news

We asked respondents who use AI chatbots for news the main reasons why. The top reason is because AI collates stories from different news sources into a single response (50%), highly rating its news aggregation function. Users also value the tools for explaining and simplifying complex information, with 43% saying they ask follow-up questions and 42% relying on AI summaries. Further, more than one-third (36%) find AI chatbots reliable and are faster than other ways of accessing news. A quarter (25%) of AI chabot users say it is the first place to go for most things (see **figure 3.6**).

Figure 3.6: Reasons for using AI chatbots for news (%)



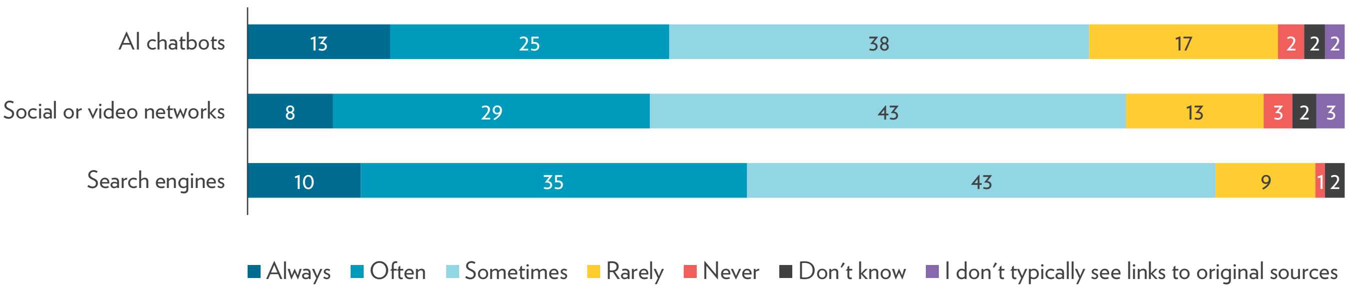
[Q_AI_motivations] Why do you use AI chatbots to get news? Please select all that apply. [Base: *n* = 174]

CLICK-THROUGHS TO ORIGINAL NEWS SOURCES

Social media and video networks have the lowest click-through rates

In an environment where the rapid adoption of AI and the uncertainty around the loss of visibility of news on search engines, social media and AI platforms is growing, we asked respondents how often they click links to original news sources. As **figure 3.7** demonstrates, search engines drive the most frequent traffic to sources, with 45% of users saying they click through 'always' or 'often' and 43% doing so 'sometimes'. Thirty-eight percent of AI chatbot news users, and 37% of social or video networks click through.

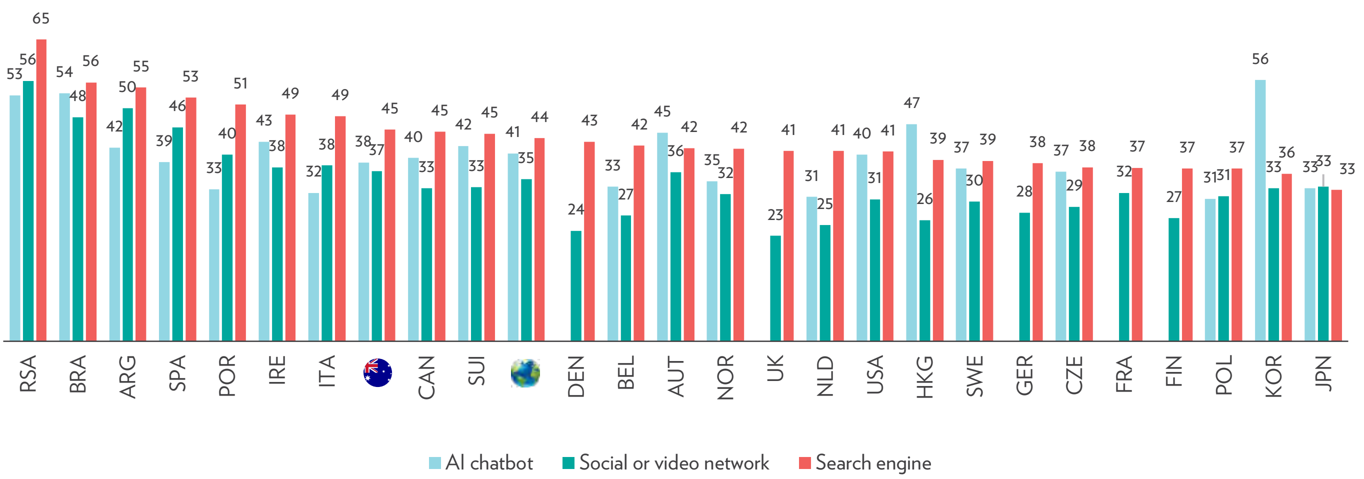
Figure 3.7: Click through to original sources linked in responses or on social media feed (%)



[Q_ClickAI] [Q_ClickSocial] [Q_ClickSearch] You said earlier in the survey you have used [an AI chatbot] [social or video networks] [a search engine] for news in the last week... How often, if at all, do you click through to the original sources that are [sometimes] linked to in the responses/on your feed? [Base: *n* = those who used an AI chatbot (174), social or video networks (1,133), or search engines (832) for news in the last week]

In the majority of countries, news consumers are most likely to click through to news sources via search engines. As shown in **figure 3.8**, this pattern is strongest in South Africa (65%), followed by Brazil (56%) and Argentina (55%). By contrast, a significantly higher proportion of news consumers in South Korea (56%) and Hong Kong (47%) are most likely to click though to sources via AI chatbots.[1]

Figure 3.8: Click through to original sources linked in responses or on social media feed by country (% always/often)

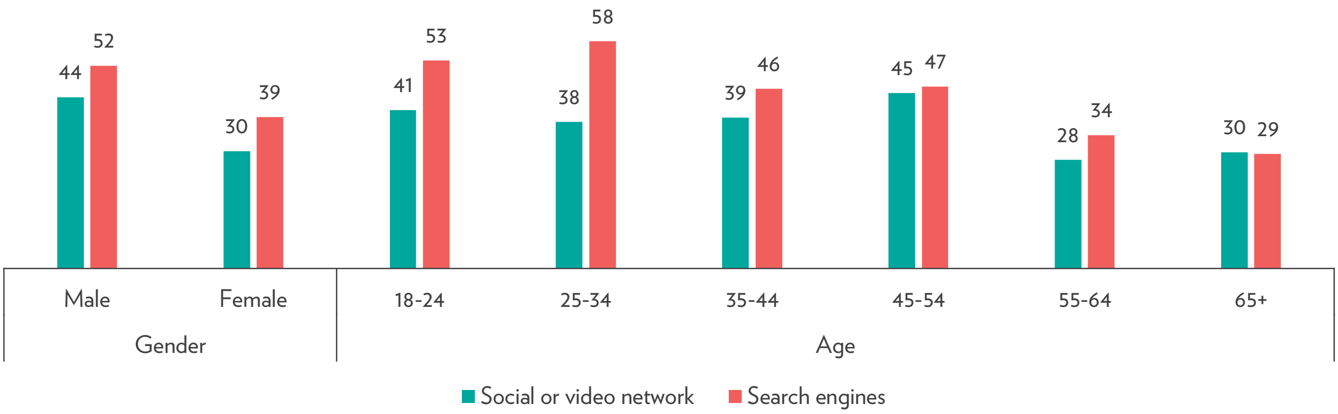


[1] Due to the small number of respondents using AI chatbots for news, further demographic analysis was not possible.

Younger people are much more likely to click through on search engines

There are differences in how often users click through to original sources across demographic groups and across different platforms. As **figure 3.9** shows, on search engines, men are significantly more likely to report frequent click-throughs than women (52% vs. 39%; 13pp gap) as well as on social or video networks (44% vs. 30%; 14pp gap). On search engines, younger people are more likely to click through to original news sources (18–24: 53%; 25–34: 58%). Conversely, the middle-aged cohort is most likely to click on the links to sources on social or video networks (45–54: 45%).

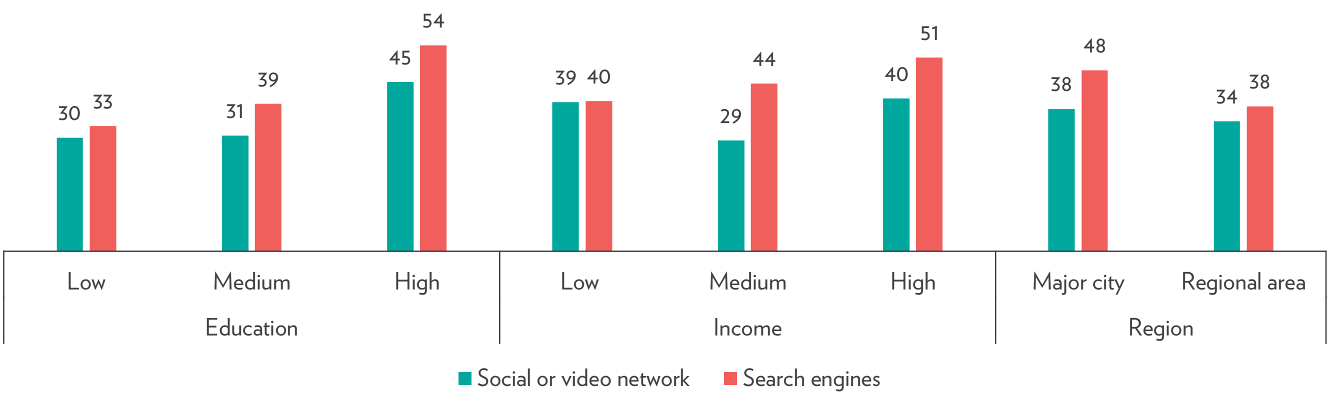
Figure 3.9: Click through to original sources linked in responses or on social media feed by gender and age (% often/always)



[Base: n = those who used social or video networks (1,133), or search engines (832) for news in the last week] * Data for AI chatbot click through was removed in this analysis due to low numbers of respondents who use AI for news.

Those with high education (54%) and high income (51%) and living in major cities (48%) are more likely to report clicking through to original sources on search engines. On social media, a slightly different pattern emerged. Those with low income (39%) are just as likely to click through as high income earners (40%) (see **figure 3.10**).

Figure 3.10: Click through to original sources linked in responses or on social media feed by education, income and region (% often/always)

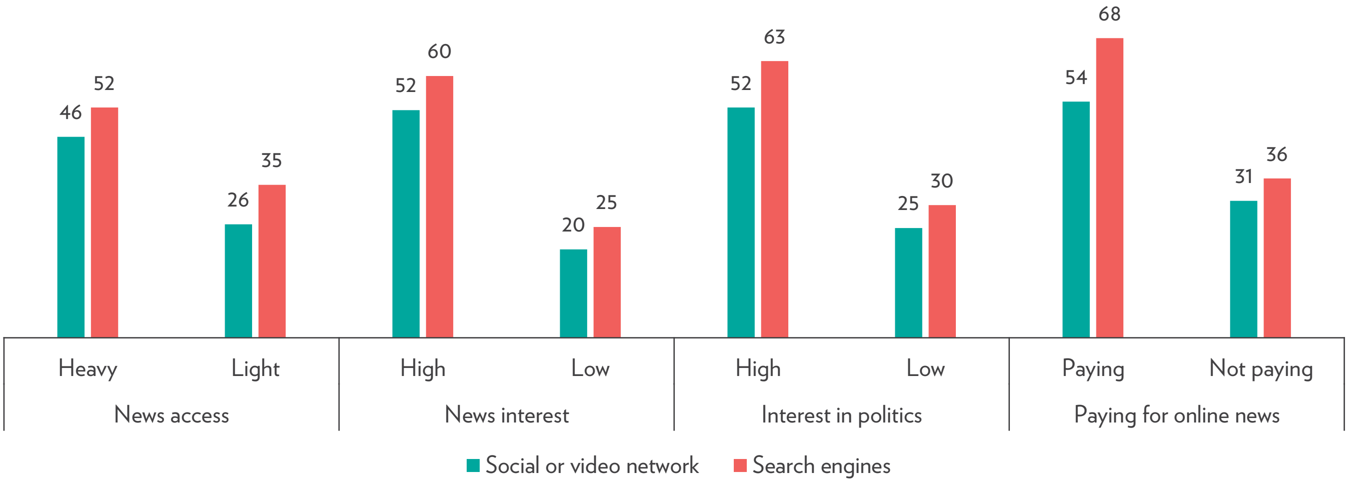


[Base: n = those who used social or video networks (1,133), or search engines (832) for news in the last week] * Data for AI chatbot click through was removed in this analysis due to low numbers of respondents who use AI for news.

More than two thirds of news payers click through on search engines

Across search engines and social or video networks, click-throughs are higher among those who pay for online news (68% and 54% respectively), have high interest in politics (63% and 52% respectively) or news in general (60% and 52% respectively), and are heavy news consumers (52% and 46% respectively) than their counterparts (see **figure 3.11**).

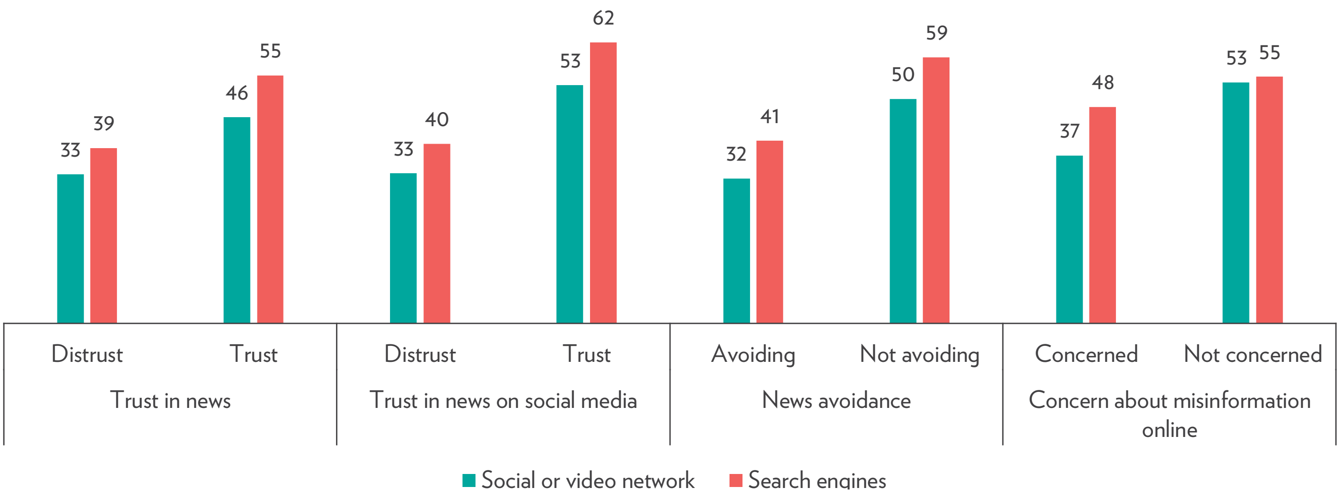
Figure 3.11: Click through to original sources linked in responses or on social media feed by news access, news interest, interest in politics, paying for online news (% often/always)



[Base: *n* = those who used social or video networks (1,133), or search engines (832) for news in the last week] * Data for AI chatbot click through was removed in this analysis due to low numbers of respondents who use AI for news.

On search engines, those who trust news on social media (62%) or news in general (55%), do not avoid news (59%), and are not concerned about misinformation online (55%) are more likely to report frequent click-throughs to original news sources than their counterparts. The trend is similar on social media (see **figure 3.12**).

Figure 3.12: Click through to original sources linked in responses or on social media feed by trust in news, trust in news on social media, news avoidance and concern about misinformation online (% often/always)



[Base: *n* = those who used social or video networks (1,133), or search engines (832) for news in the last week] * Data for AI chatbot click through was removed in this analysis due to low numbers of respondents who use AI for news.

There is no significant difference in the frequency of click-throughs to original news sources between users with a left-wing political orientation (53% for search engines and 41% for social or video networks) and with a right-wing orientation (52% and 42% respectively) (see **figure 3.13**).

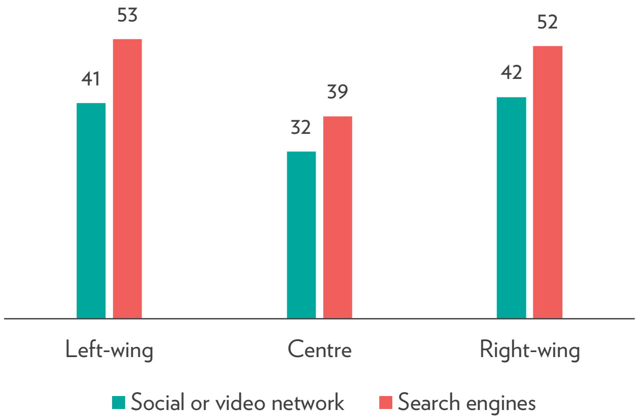
Click-through to verify

Search 42%

Social 37%

AI chatbots 49%

Figure 3.13: Click through to original sources linked in responses or on social media feed by political orientation (% often/always)

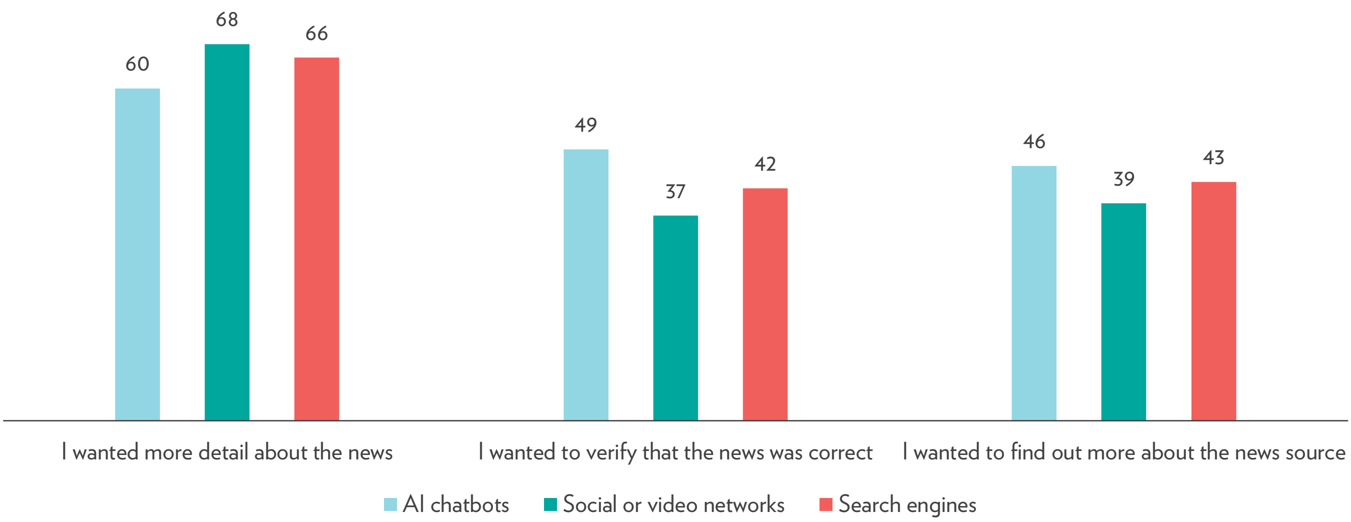


[Base: *n* = those who used social or video networks (1,133), or search engines (832) for news in the last week] * Data for AI chatbot click through was removed in this analysis due to low numbers of respondents who use AI for news.

Users click on search and social for more details and on AI chatbots to verify

People's motivations for clicking links to original sources differ depending on the platform they use. As **figure 3.14** shows, across all platforms, the need for more detail about the news is the most common reason for clicking through, though it is higher for social or video networks (68%) and search engines (66%) than for AI chatbots (60%). In contrast, when on AI chatbots, audiences are much more likely to click a source link to verify the accuracy of the news (49%) than when they are on search engines (42%) or social media (37%). People are also more likely to click through AI chatbot responses, specifically to find out more about the news source (46%) compared to the other platforms.

Figure 3.14: Reasons to click through to original sources (%)

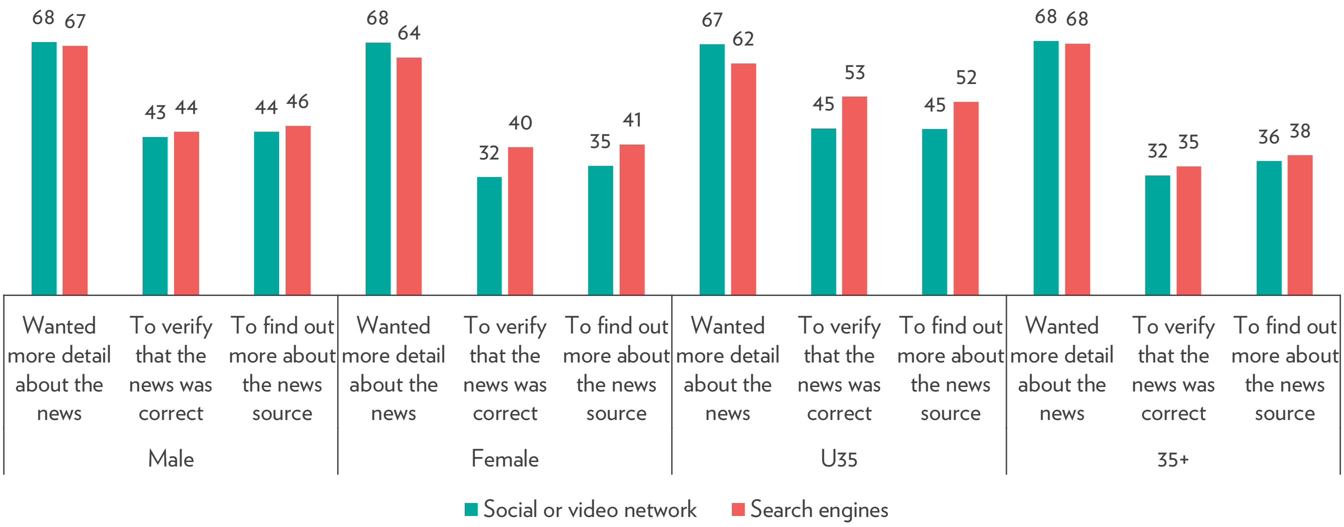


[Q_ClickMotive] [Q_ClickMotiveSM] [Q_ClickMotiveSE] Which of the following have you done in the last week when clicking a link to an original source when using [an AI chatbot] [social media or video networks] [a search engine]? Please select all that apply. [Base: *n* = those who clicked through to an original source from an AI chatbot (163), social or video networks (976), or search engines (1,216) in the last week]

Seeking details on search and social media is the most common driver across all demographics

Across both social or video networks and search engines, the need for more detailed news is the most common reason for clicking through to original sources across demographics. As shown in **figure 3.15**, this pattern is consistent for men (68% and 67% respectively) and women (68% and 64%), as well as for those under 35 (67% and 62%) and those aged 35 and over (68% for both).

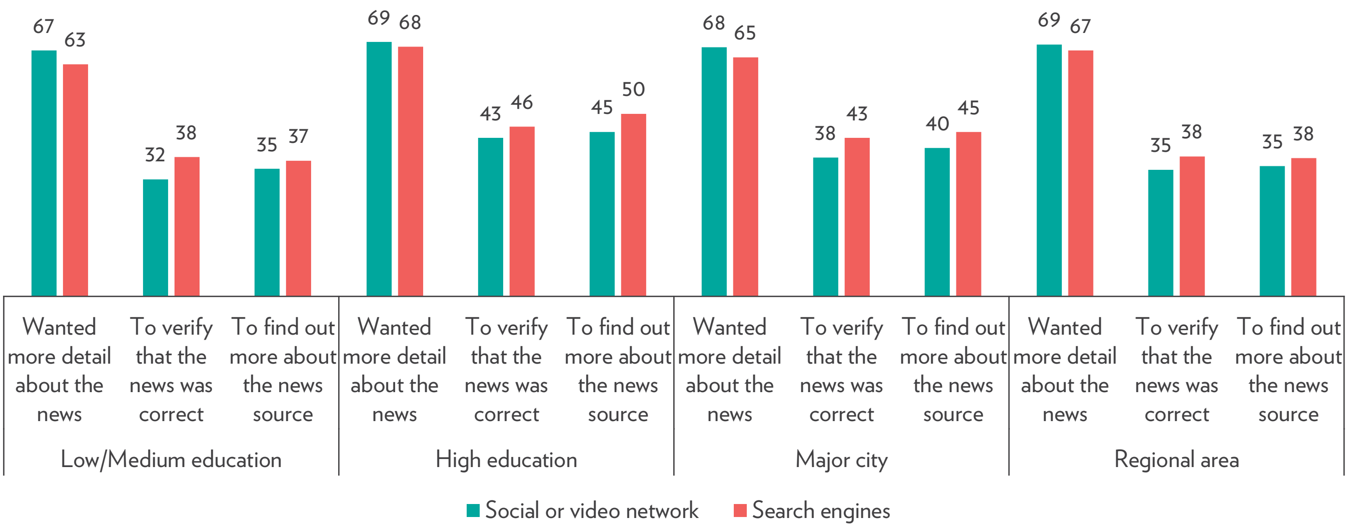
Figure 3.15: Reasons to click through to original sources by gender and age (%)



[Base: *n* = those who used social or video networks (1,133), or search engines (832) for news in the last week] * Data for AI chatbot click through was removed in this analysis due to low numbers of respondents who use AI for news.

Seeking details is also the most common reason among those with high education (69% and 68% respectively) and low/medium education (67% and 63% respectively) and across urban dwellers (68% and 65% respectively) and regional residents (69% and 67% respectively) (see **figure 3.16**).

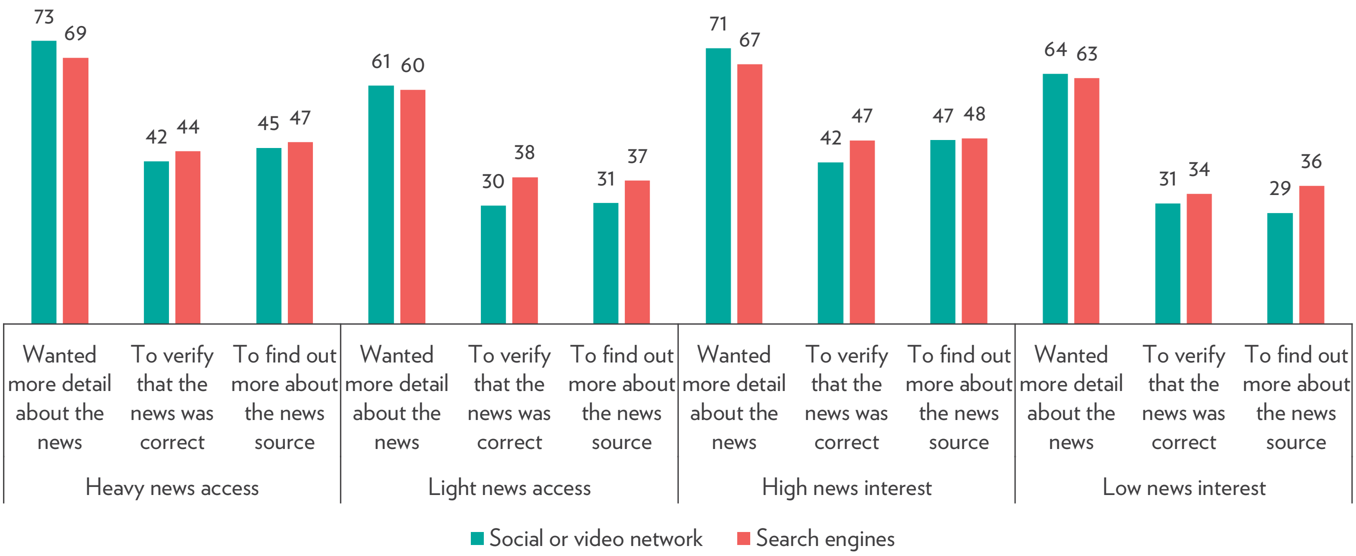
Figure 3.16: Reasons to click through to original sources by education and region (%)



[Base: *n* = those who used social or video networks (1,133), or search engines (832) for news in the last week] * Data for AI chatbot click through was removed in this analysis due to low numbers of respondents who use AI for news.

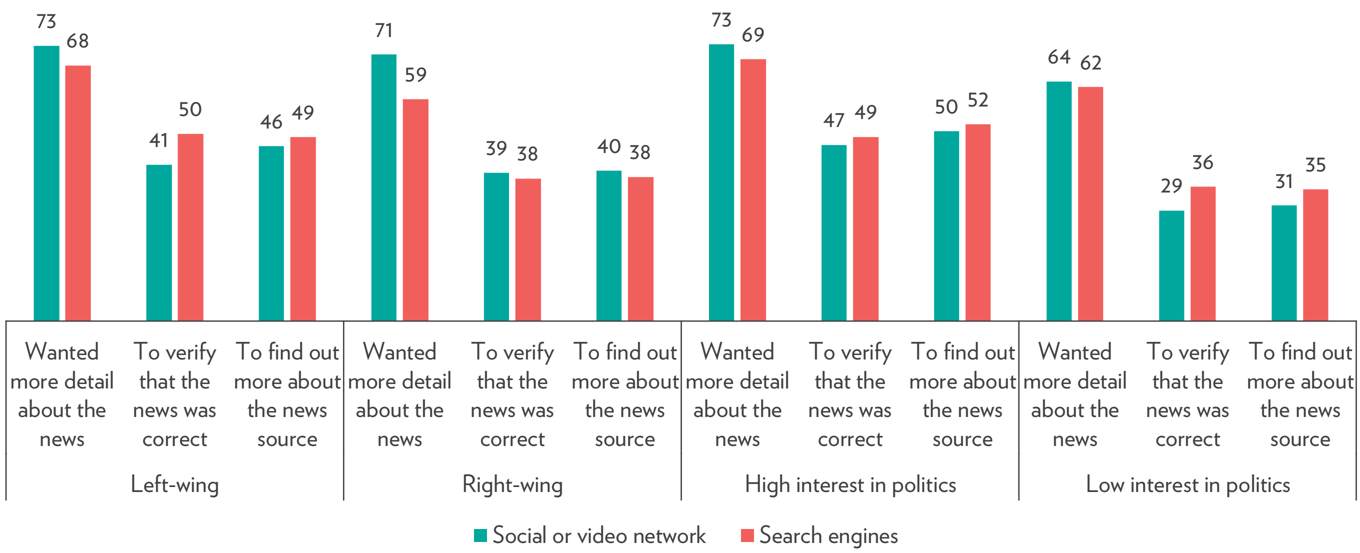
Heavy news consumers and those with high interest in news are much more likely to click through to sources on social or video networks, or search engines. Among heavy news users who click through on social, 73% say that they want more detail, 42% say they want to verify if news is correct and 45% say they want to find out more about the news source. These proportions are much higher than light news users, among which only 61% click through on social media because they want to find more detail, 30% to verify if news is correct and 31% to find out more about the news source. Similar trends exist for news interest and search engine users (see **figure 3.17**).

Figure 3.17: Reasons to click through to original sources by news access and news interest (%)



Likewise, for both social or video networks and search engines, seeking more detailed news is the most common reason for clicking through to original sources, regardless of political orientation or level of political interest. As shown in **figure 3.18**, left-leaning users are more likely to seek additional details (73% and 68%, respectively) than right leaning users (71% and 59%). Similarly, those with high interest in politics are more likely to do so (73% and 69%) than those with low interest (64% and 62%).

Figure 3.18: Reasons to click through to original sources by political orientation and interest in politics (%)



[Base: *n* = those who used social or video networks (1,133), or search engines (832) for news in the last week] * Data for AI chatbot click through was removed in this analysis due to low numbers of respondents who use AI for news.

SUMMARY

The news industry is currently navigating the interconnected challenges of rapidly changing audience behaviour and a continuous decline in traditional referral traffic to publishers. Reflecting this shift, the use of generative AI chatbots for news discovery and consumption is steadily rising, now reaching one in ten Australians. This audience is mainly comprised of men, younger cohorts, those with high education, higher-income earners, and major city residents. Many of them are paying for online news, engaged in news and politics, and trust news. It is likely that these active news consumers are also using AI chatbots as a source of news along with many other platforms.

Rather than passively consuming information, audiences are using AI chatbots to actively interrogate and interact with news. Half of these users value the technology primarily for its ability to aggregate stories from multiple outlets into a single, efficient response. Other common usage involves asking follow-up questions, requesting summaries, and simplifying complex topics, highlighting a demand for an augmented news experience.

When looking into original news sources, click-through habits vary significantly by platform and demographic. Search engines consistently drive the most frequent referral traffic to sources, particularly among men, young audiences, news payers, and those interested in politics or news.

Across all demographics and political orientations, the universal driver for clicking an original news source link is the desire for detailed information. While users on search engines and social media predominantly click links to uncover further details, when on AI chatbots, people are more driven by a need for fact-checking the information or evaluating the original news sources. As the industry grapples with changing habits and traffic drops, understanding these distinct motivations reveals that while AI may disrupt traditional news discovery, the fundamental need for authoritative, verifiable original reporting remains strong.

COMMENTARY

AI AND THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM

Will Hayward, Adjunct Professor, University of Canberra

We should hesitate before drawing firm conclusions from this year's data. ChatGPT launched a little over three years ago. The technology is changing fast enough that next year is hard to predict, let alone the next decade. And globally, only 9% of news consumers turn to AI chatbots for news in any given week.

Even so, two distinct use cases have emerged from what data we do have. One looks broadly positive — at least in terms of the core purpose of journalism. The other, less so.

First, the variance in usage. Whether you call them the professional-managerial class or simply the credentialed class, the most enthusiastic adopters are exactly who you'd expect: higher income, better educated, urban, and — crucially — already paying for news. AI news use among news payers (17%) is nearly double the population average. The young follow closely, confirming the familiar pattern of tech adoption beginning with the credentialed elite and broadening with the next generation.

The positive read is that these audiences are using AI to better understand the journalism they already engage with.

The most common use case is asking follow-up questions — interrogating or clarifying what they've read. If the mission of journalism is to help people understand what is going on, this is entirely in line with what the industry wants. Whatever the implications for the business model, a more active approach to news consumption is a good thing in itself.

These same audiences are clicking links from AI chatbots specifically to verify information — a departure from how they behave on search and social, where the click is mostly for more detail. Half of AI news users cite verification as a reason they click through. Most appear to understand AI can get things wrong and act accordingly. Another point in the positive column.

To extend the bull case: if these systems continue to improve by ingesting verifiable information rather than rewarding the shareability or outrage that defined the social-media era, that is a positive structural shift. AI companies are already striking content licensing deals with major publishers. After two decades in which platforms extracted value from journalism without paying for it, this could finally produce something resembling a genuine value exchange between the two sectors.

The more worrying use case is also the second most popular. Audiences are using AI to aggregate and summarise news — and half of AI news users cite this as a primary reason for turning to the technology in the first place.

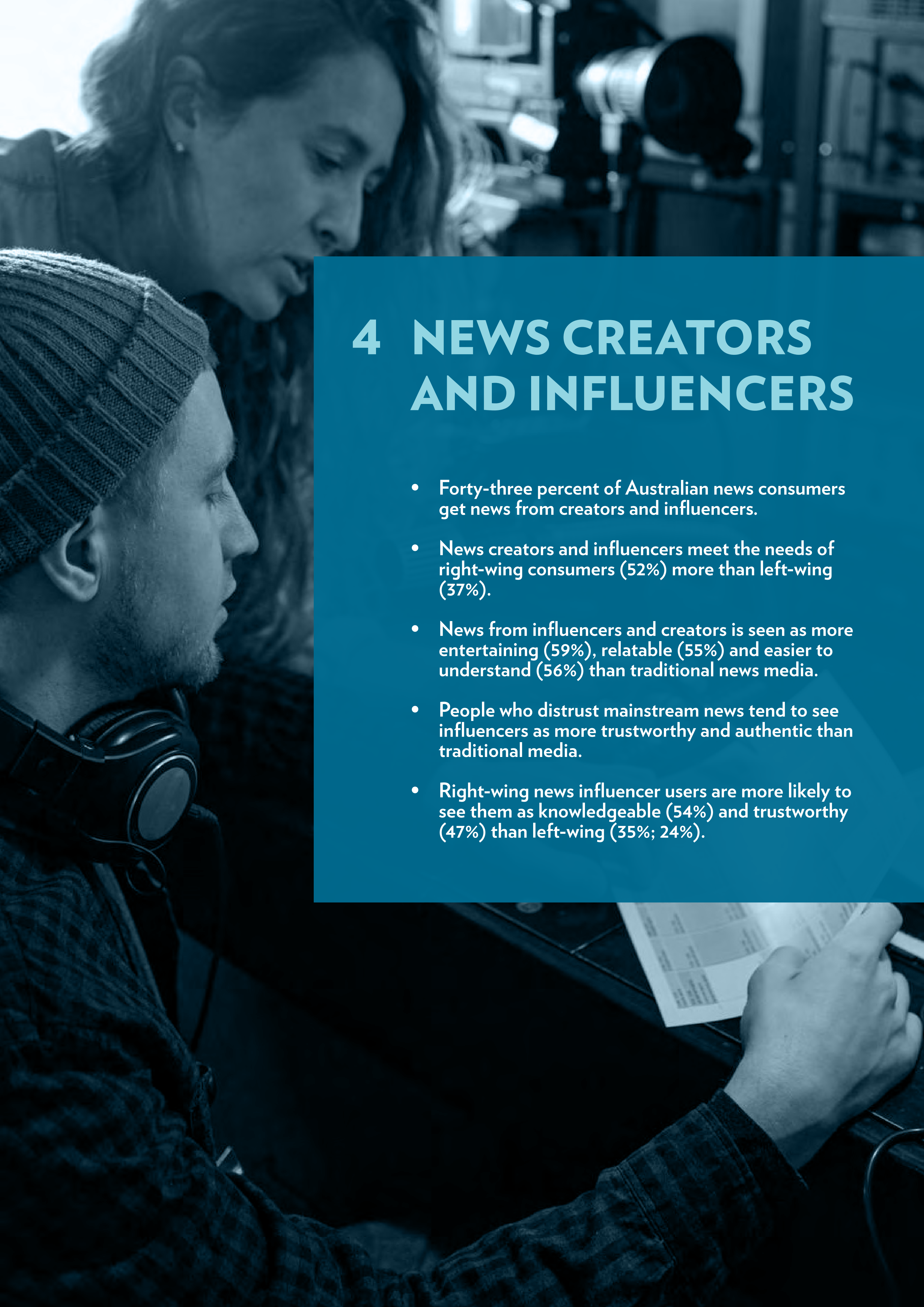
Disintermediation between publishers and their audiences has historically been bad for both.

The rise of search and social stripped billions of dollars from media companies and helped collapse regional reporting. AI aggregation does the same work, only more efficiently: the synthesis happens before the user ever sees a publisher's brand. The masthead becomes raw material for someone else's product. And the audience moving fastest is the one publishers can least afford to lose — the engaged, credentialed minority that already pays.

What does all this mean for the industry? Media has been in structural decline for a decade, whether you measure by revenue, profits, or headcount. AI looks like it might accelerate that decline, particularly because it captures the highest-value audience first. The question for anyone who cares about the future of public-interest journalism is what — if anything — can be done to slow it.

Since ChatGPT launched, we've heard plenty of confident pronouncements about the limits of AI, most of which haven't aged well. Hallucination rates are down. Agents have arrived. Image and video generation are unrecognisable from the era of seven-fingered hands. Most pronouncements about AI's future that are based on its present limitations seem, to me at least, highly questionable.

But we are still a long way from AI turning up at press conferences, working sources, or producing informed original opinion. The reporting layer — the work of actually finding things out — remains stubbornly human. Human journalism built for human readers should have years left in it. Whether the institutions that produce it do is a different question entirely.



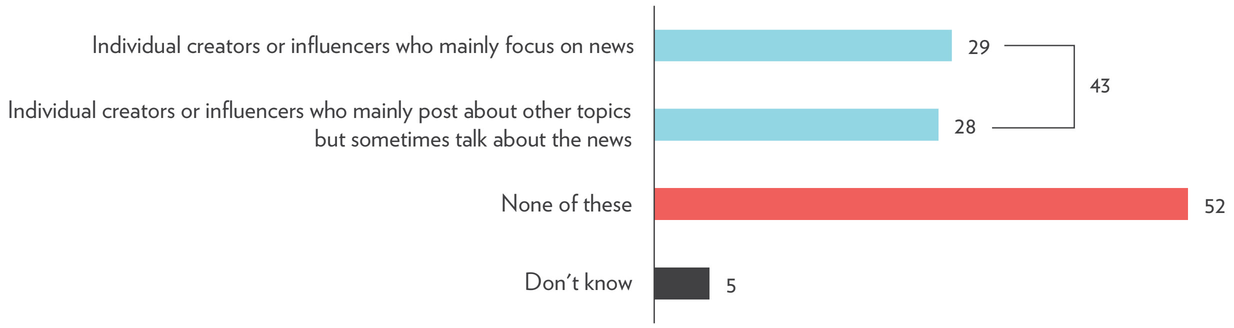
4 NEWS CREATORS AND INFLUENCERS

- Forty-three percent of Australian news consumers get news from creators and influencers.
- News creators and influencers meet the needs of right-wing consumers (52%) more than left-wing (37%).
- News from influencers and creators is seen as more entertaining (59%), relatable (55%) and easier to understand (56%) than traditional news media.
- People who distrust mainstream news tend to see influencers as more trustworthy and authentic than traditional media.
- Right-wing news influencer users are more likely to see them as knowledgeable (54%) and trustworthy (47%) than left-wing (35%; 24%).

Almost half of the participants consume news produced by creators and influencers

This year we asked questions about how Australians engage with news creators and influencers; 29% consumed news from individual creators or influencers who had a news focus, 28% from those who posted on other topics with the occasional mention of news, 52% said they didn't get news from creators or influencers, and 5% were unsure (see **figure 4.1**).

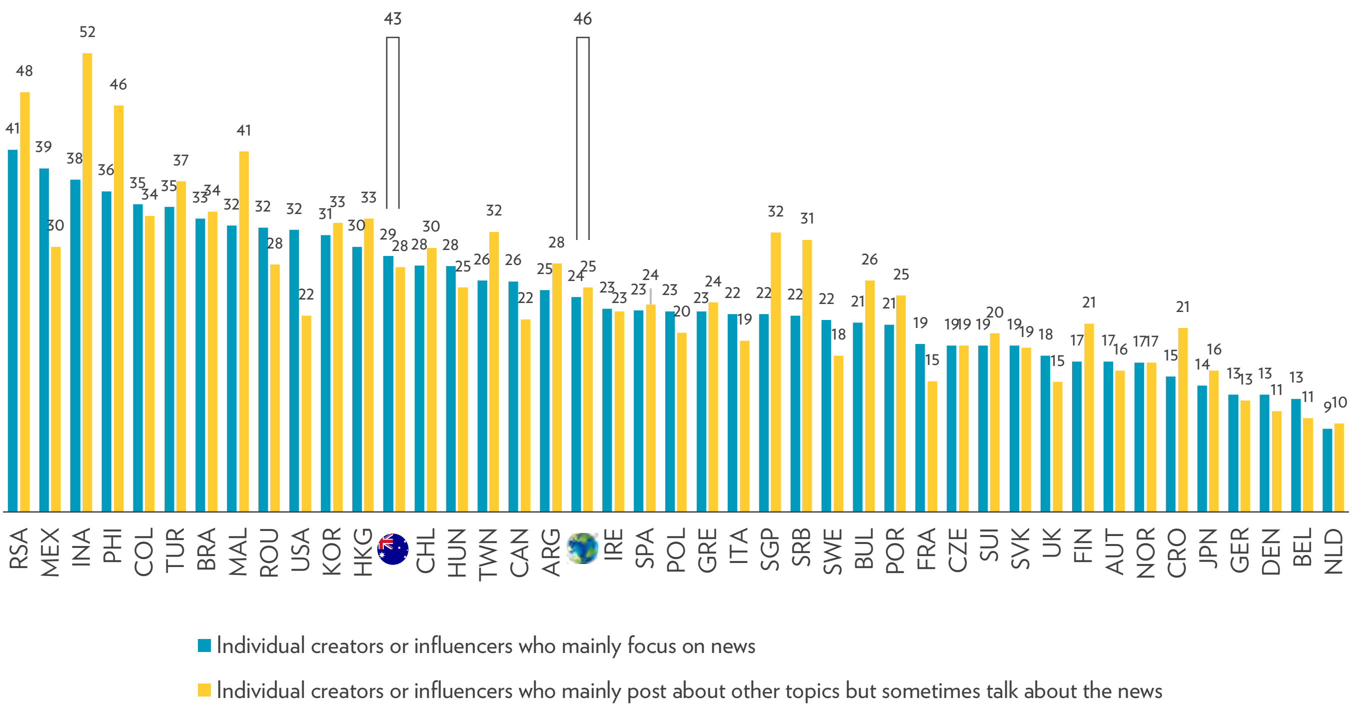
Figure 4.1: Creators/influencers as sources of news (%)



[Q_Creators1_2026] In the last week, have you consumed news from any of the following? This could be on social and video networks (e.g. TikTok, Instagram, YouTube), web portal (e.g. Substack), or podcast, etc. Please select all that apply. [Base: *n* = 2,025]

Australia sits just above the global average when it comes to engaging with news creators and influencers. Twenty-nine percent of Australian respondents say they consume news from creators or influencers who mainly focus on news, which is 5 pp higher than the global average (24%). A similar proportion of Australian participants (28%) engage with creators or influencers that focus on other topics, but include some news, compared to the global average of 25%. In countries like India (52%) and South Africa (48%), the proportion of news consumers getting news from creators or influencers who focus on other topics is high. In contrast, in the Netherlands only 10% access news from creators or influencers, indicating a wide variation across the globe (see **figure 4.2**).

Figure 4.2: Creators/influencers as sources of news by country (%)

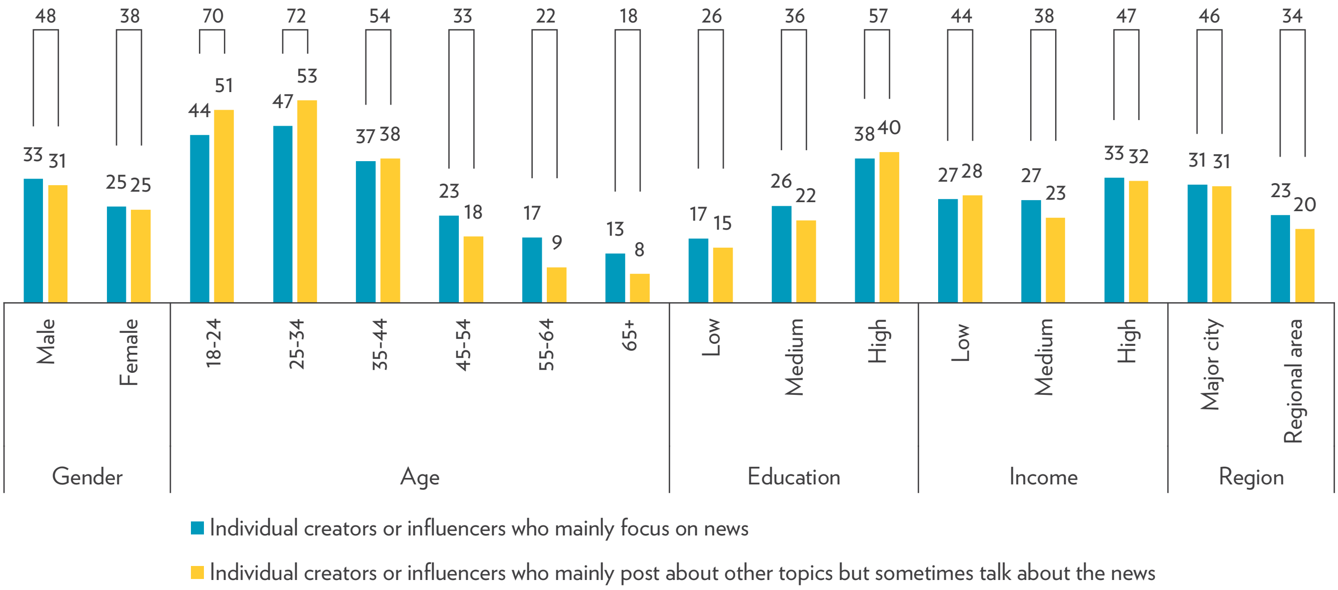


[Base: *n* = 85,586]

Three-quarters of 25–34-year-olds get news from creators and influencers

Young people are much more likely to say they get news from influencers. Among 18–24-year-olds, 51% follow creators and influencers who mainly post on other topics but occasionally mention news, and 44% get news from dedicated news creators and influencers. The pattern is similar for for 25–34s (53% and 47%). Men, those with high education, high income and live in the city are more likely to access news from creators or influencers compared to their counterparts (see **figure 4.3**).

Figure 4.3: Creators/influencers as sources of news by demographics (%)



Accessing creators or influencers for news appears to be related to news interest and trust. Among those who pay for news, 47% say they get news from these content makers, compared to less than one in four among those who don't pay. Interest in politics is also linked to using these sources. People with high political interest are about twice as likely as those with low interest to say they access news from creators and influencers (see **figure 4.4**). Notably, overall trust in the news media does not seem to predict whether people get news from creators or influencers. Instead, perceptions of trust in news on social media is a better predictor. Those who trust news they encounter on social media are much more likely to use news from news-focused creators and influencers (45%) than those who distrust news on social media (23%) (see **figure 4.5**)

Figure 4.4: Creators/influencers as sources of news by news access, news interest, interest in politics and paying for online news (%)

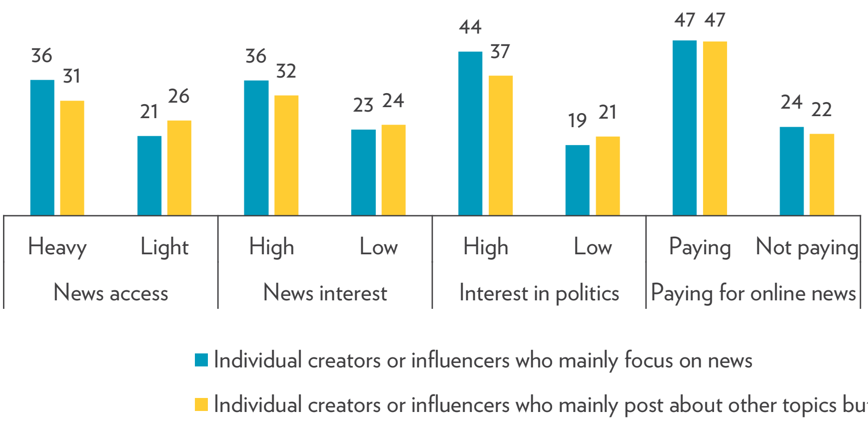
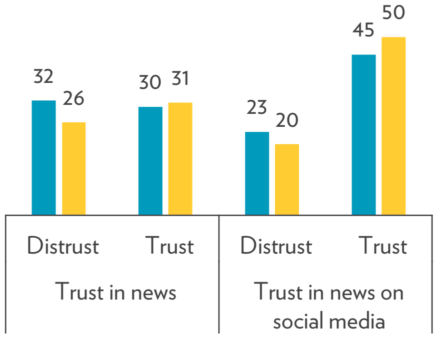


Figure 4.5: Creators/influencers as sources of news by trust in news and trust in news on social media (%)



Left-wing respondents are more likely than those on the right or in the centre to say they get news from creators or influencers whether they focus on news or only sometimes talk about it. Forty-two percent of left-wing participants say they access news from news-focused creators or influencers, compared with 31% of right-wing and 23% of centre (see **figure 4.6**).

The data show that news consumers are drawn to creators and influencers who either shares their point of view or challenges them. This differs from the broader trend across all respondents. More than half (51%) say they prefer news from sources that don't have a point of view, and only 20% prefer news that aligns with their perspective, or challenges it (15%). However, among those who get news from either news focused creators or influencers or creators who only occasionally post about news, the proportion who prefer news from sources that share or challenge their point of view is much higher (44%; 33%) (see **figure 4.7**)

Figure 4.6: Creators/influencers as sources of news by political orientation (%)

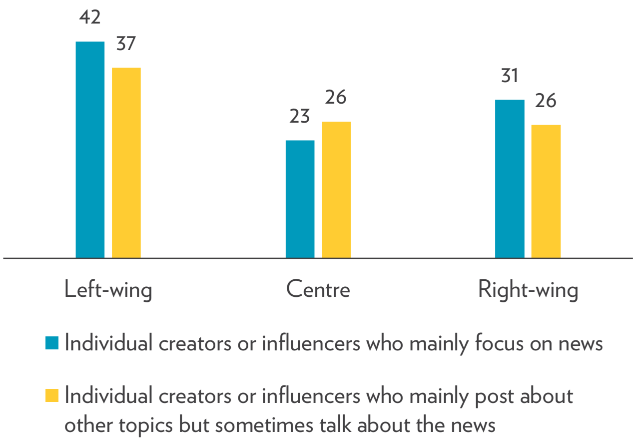
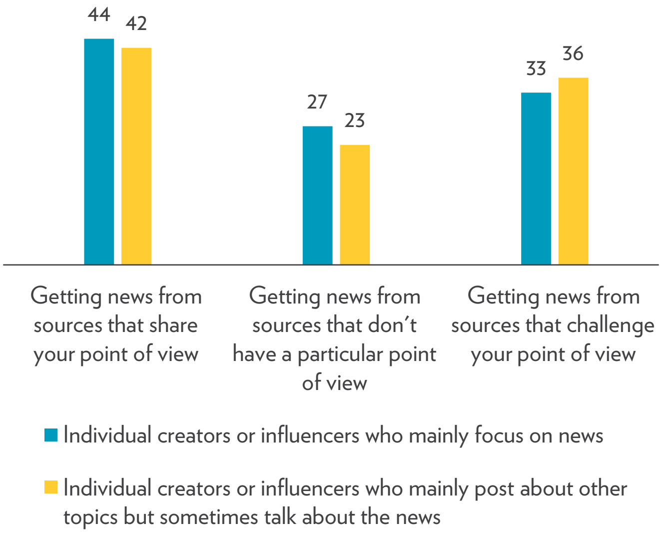


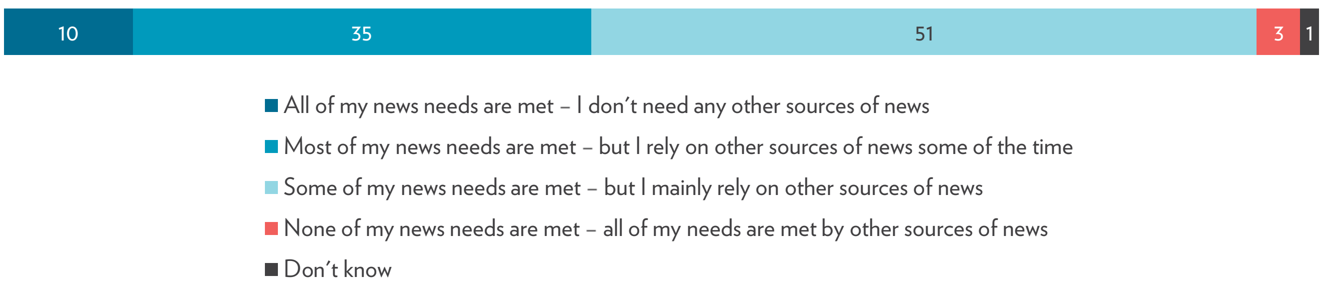
Figure 4.7: Creators/influencers as sources of news by preference for point of view in news (%)



Half of those who access news from creators or influencers say their needs are met

Among participants who get their news from creators and influencers who focus on news, almost half (45%) say they have all or most of their news needs met. However, more than half (51%) still rely on other sources of news, and only 3% say none of their needs are met by these content makers. This suggests that news provided by creators and influencers complements a wider news diet (see **figure 4.8**).

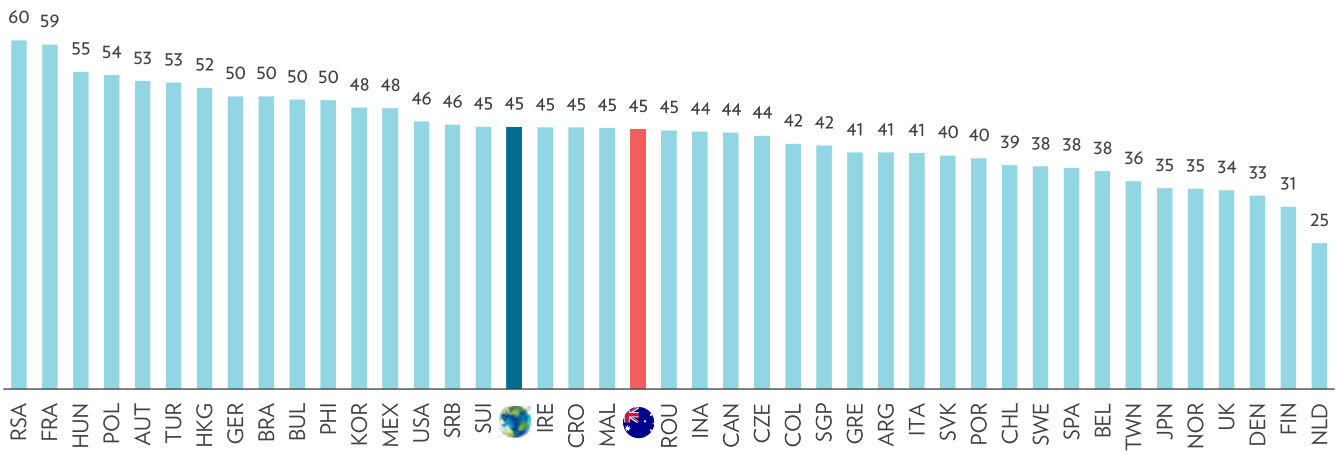
Figure 4.8: **Needs met by news creators/influencers (%)**



[Q_Creators3_2026] You said that you have consumed news from one or more creators or influencers who mainly focus on news in the last week. How much of your information needs are met by these creators or influencers? [Base: *n* = 587]

Internationally, Australia (45%) is on par with the global average (45%) when it comes to feeling that creators and influencers meet people's news needs, along with countries such as Switzerland, Ireland, Croatia, Malaysia and Romania. South Africa has the highest percentage of participants who say their news needs are met by influencers and creators (60%), while Scandinavian countries such as the Netherlands (25%), Finland (31%) and Denmark (33%) have the lowest (see **figure 4.9**).

Figure 4.9: Needs met by news creators/influencers by country (% all or most of my needs are met)



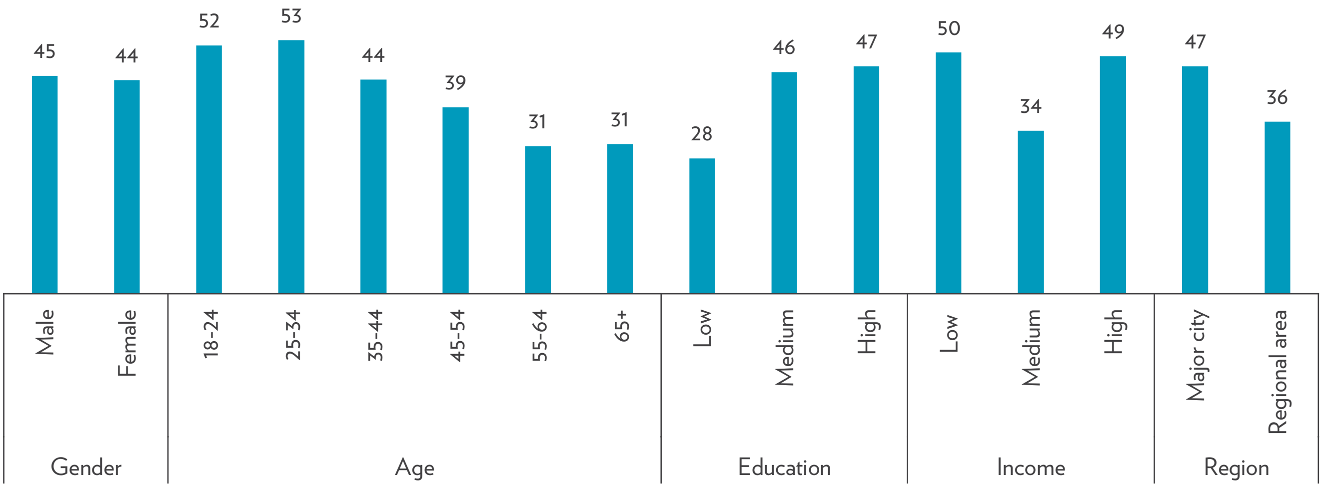
[Base: *n* = 20,752]

Younger people are more likely say their news needs are met by news creators or influencers

More than half of 18–24s (52%) and 25–34s (53%) say their news needs are met by news creators or influencers, and this drops to almost a third in older generations (55–64s and 65+ both 31%). There is very little difference in the results between men (45%) and women (44%), and those with medium (46%) or high (47%) levels of education.

Both low-income (50%) and high-income (49%) earners are more likely to have their needs met by creators or influencers compared to medium earners (34%). Those who live in a major city (47%) are more likely to say their needs are met, compared to just over a third (36%) of regional consumers (see **figure 4.10**).

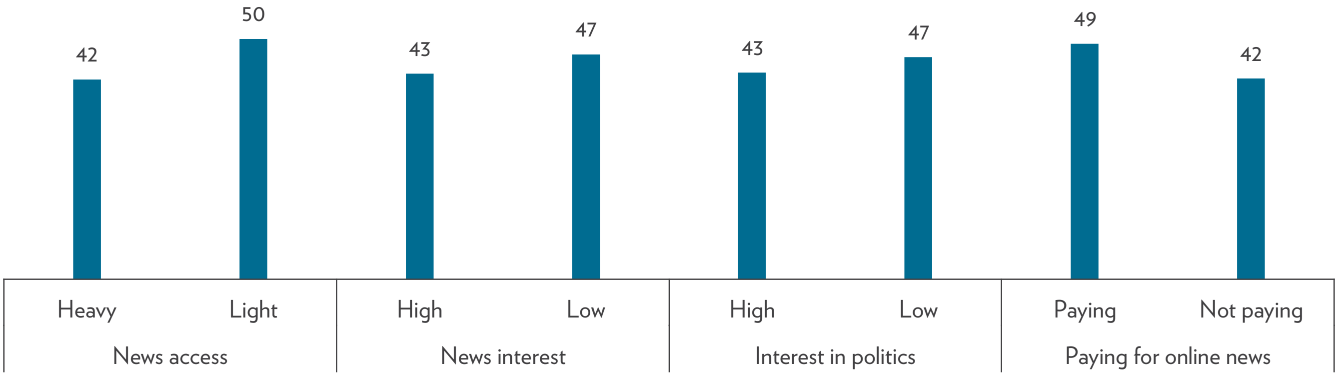
Figure 4.10: Needs met by news creators/influencers by demographics (% all or most of my needs are met)



News creators and influencers meet the needs of light news users

Light news users (50%), and those with low interest in news (47%) and politics (47%) are more likely to have their news needs met by creators or influencers. Interestingly, almost half of those who pay for online news (49%) say their news needs are met (see **figure 4.11**). This is possibly due to the fact that younger generations are more likely to pay for news and are also more likely to get news from creators and influencers.

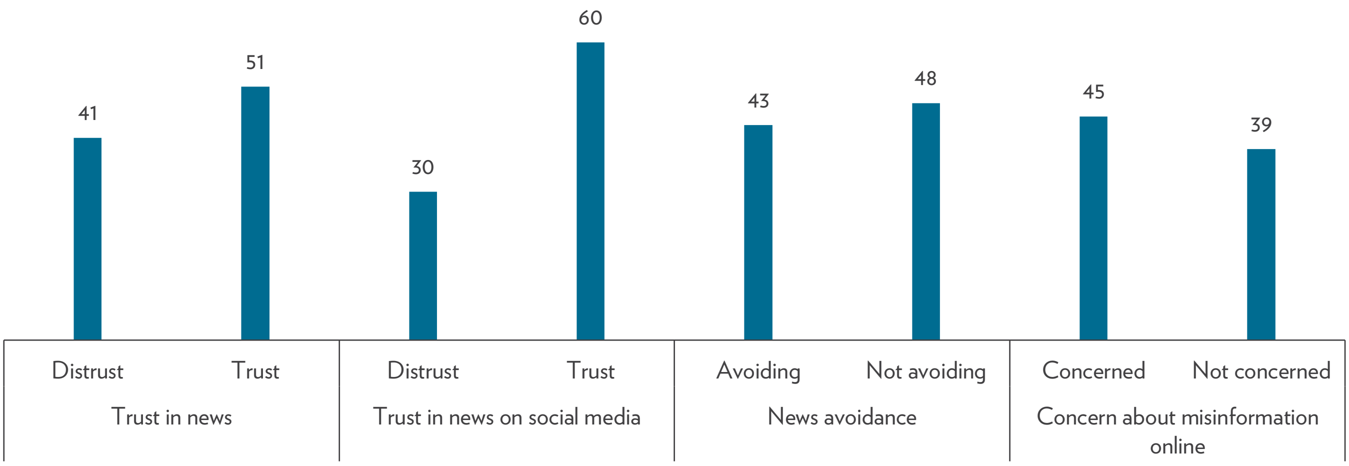
Figure 4.11: Needs met by news creators/influencers by news access, news interest, interest in politics and paying for online news (% all or most of my needs are met)



Trust in news on social media is a strong indicator that people feel their news needs are are being met by creators or influencers

Those who trust news on social media (60%) are twice as likely to say their news needs are met by creators and influencers than those who distrust news (30%). Trust in news in general is also a positive indicator, though the difference is smaller (trust 51% vs. distrust 41%). Those who do not avoid news (48%) and are concerned about misinformation (45%) are also more likely to say their needs are met than their counterparts (see **figure 4.12**).

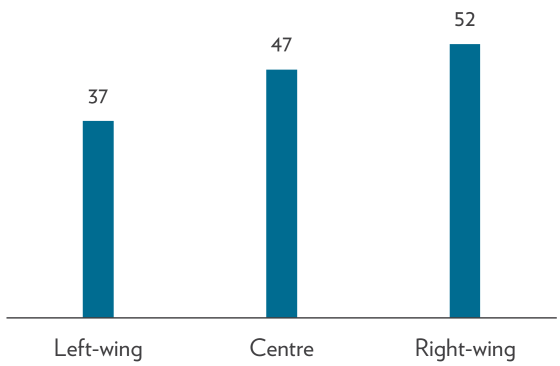
Figure 4.12: Needs met by news creators/influencers by trust in news, trust in news on social media, news avoidance and concern about misinformation online (% all or most of my needs are met)



News creators and influencers satisfy right-wing consumers' news needs

There is a significant difference in the attitude towards creator and influencers based on people's political orientation. Those with a right-wing perspective are much more likely to say that their news needs are met by creators or influencers (52%) than those with a left-wing orientation (37%). Almost half of respondents in the centre of the political spectrum (47%) say influencers and creators satisfy their news needs (see **figure 4.13**).

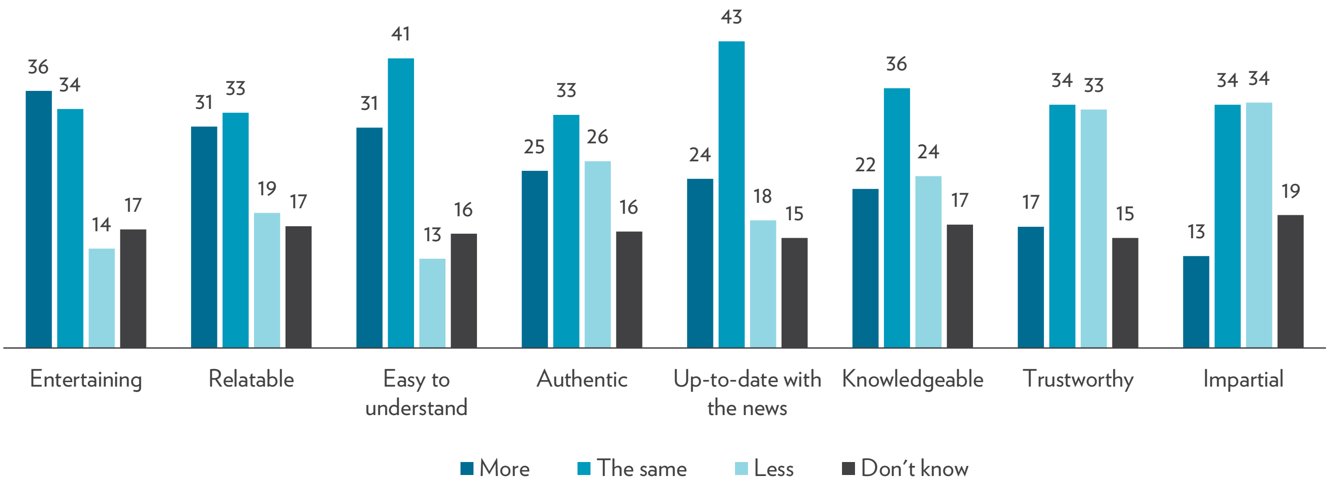
Figure 4.13: Needs met by news creators/influencers by political orientation (% all or most of my needs are met)



News creators and influencers are more entertaining than traditional news

We asked respondents about the value they receive from creators and influencers who mainly focus on news. Users find them more entertaining than traditional news brands and outlets (36%), but many also find them less knowledgeable (24%), less trustworthy (33%) and less impartial (34%). There is also a large number of proportion who say they don't know if there is a difference between traditional news brands and influencers or creators in relation to these qualities (15%–19%). This possibly reflects the proportion of respondents who are unfamiliar with, or don't engage with, news creators or influencers (see **figure 4.14**)

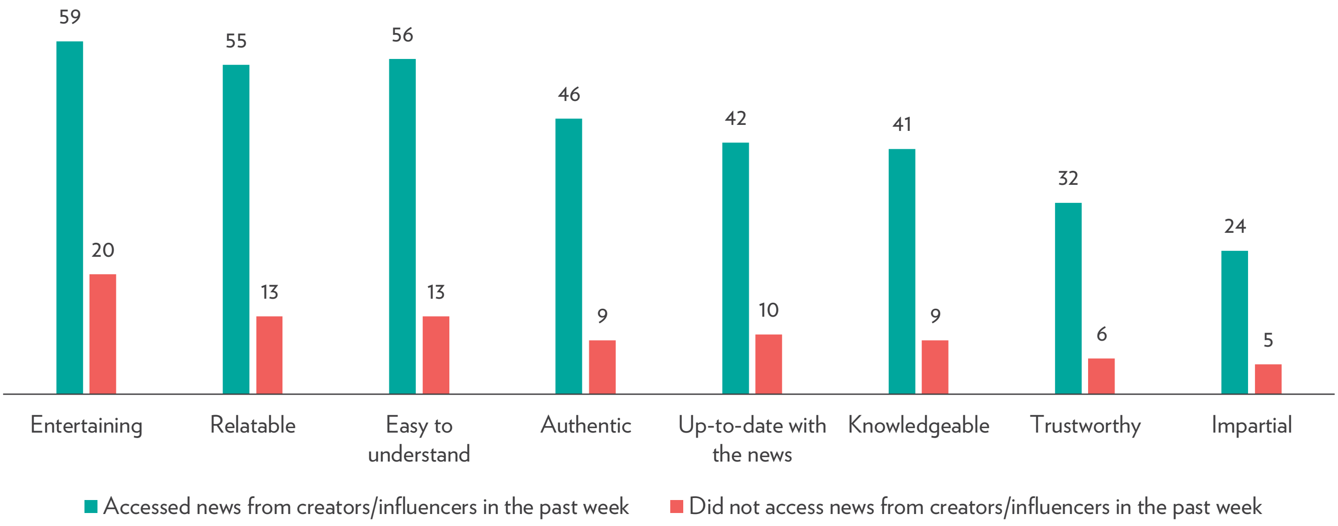
Figure 4.14: Value of news creators/influencers (%)



[Q_Creators4_2026] Comparing content from news creators or news influencers with traditional news brands and outlets, would you say that news creators or news influencers are more or less of the following... [Base: *n* = 2,025]

We compared consumers who access news from news creators or influencers and those who do not. There was a stark difference in their value perception of these content makers. Almost two-thirds of those who get news through news creators or influencers say the news they provide is more entertaining (61%), relatable (59%) and easier to understand (59%) than traditional news media (see **figure 4.15**).

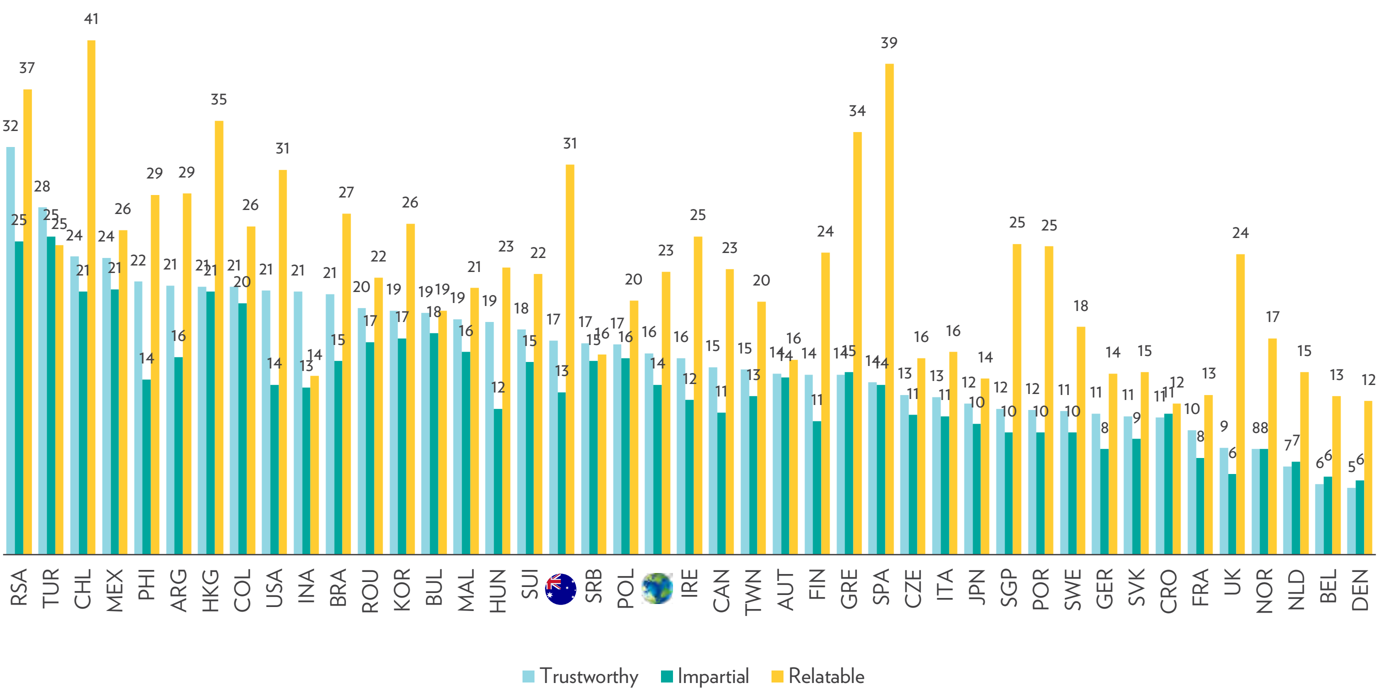
Figure 4.15: Value of news creators/influence by access to news through news creators/influencers (% more)



[Q_Creators1_2026] In the last week, have you consumed news from any of the following? This could be on social and video networks (e.g. TikTok, Instagram, YouTube), web portal (e.g. Substack), or podcast, etc. -Individual creators or influencers who mainly focus on news and individual creator or influencers who mainly post about other optics but sometimes talk about news. [Base: *n* = 2,025]

Globally, Australia is very close to the average when it comes to user perceptions of the trustworthiness (Aus 17% vs. global 16%) and impartiality (Aus 13% vs. global 14%) of news creators and influencers but Australians tend to find them more relatable (Aus 31% vs. global 23%). While Australia is close to the average in relation to perceptions of the trustworthiness and impartiality of news creators and influencers, it is equal sixth with the US (31%) when it comes to relatability after Chile (41%), Spain (39%), South Africa (37%), Hong Kong (35%) and Greece (34%) (see **figure 4.16**).

Figure 4.16: Value of news creators/influencers by country (%)



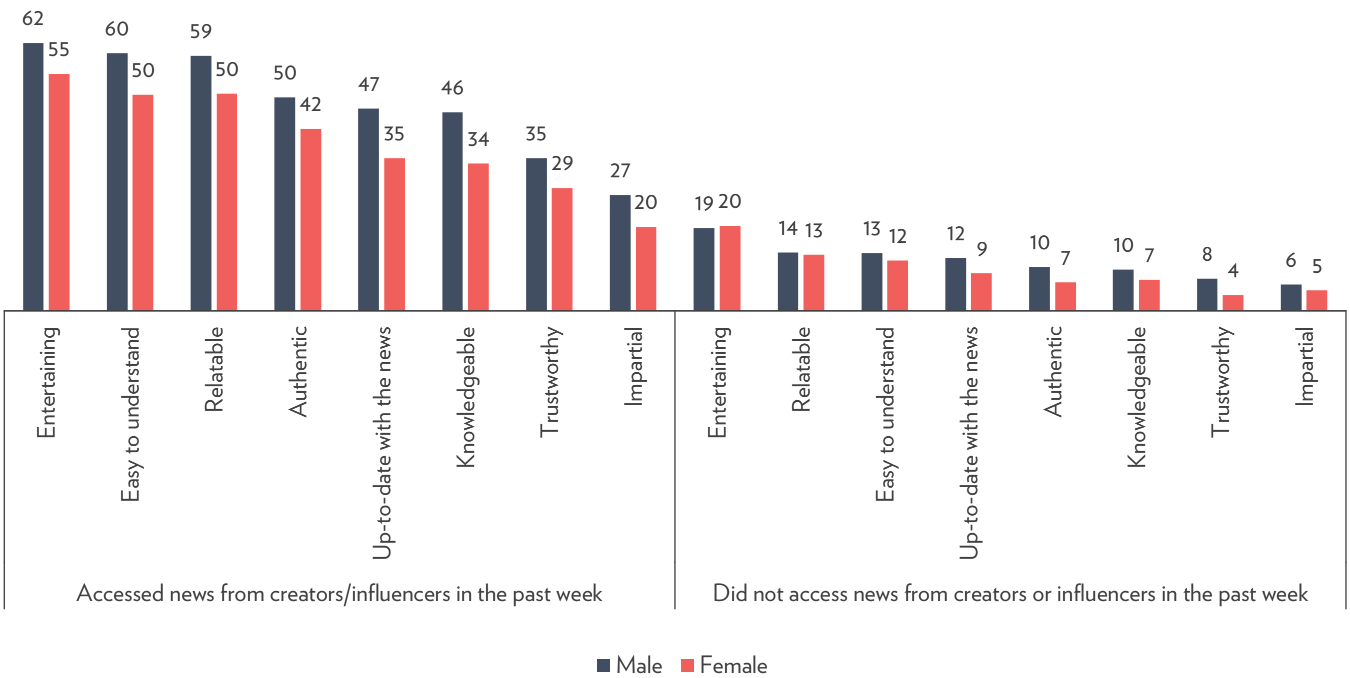
[Base: *n* = 85,384]

Men are more likely to find news creators and influencers more valuable

Among those who access news from individual creators or influencers, men are more likely than women to perceive these creators as being better than traditional news brands and outlets. For example, 62% of men in this group versus 55% of women say news influencers are more entertaining, easy to understand (60% vs. 50%) and relatable (59% vs. 50%) than traditional news media (see **figure 4.17**).

Respondents who say they don't access news from influencers are less likely to see much value in them, and there is little or no difference between men and women in this regard.

Figure 4.17: Value of news creators/influencers by gender (% more)



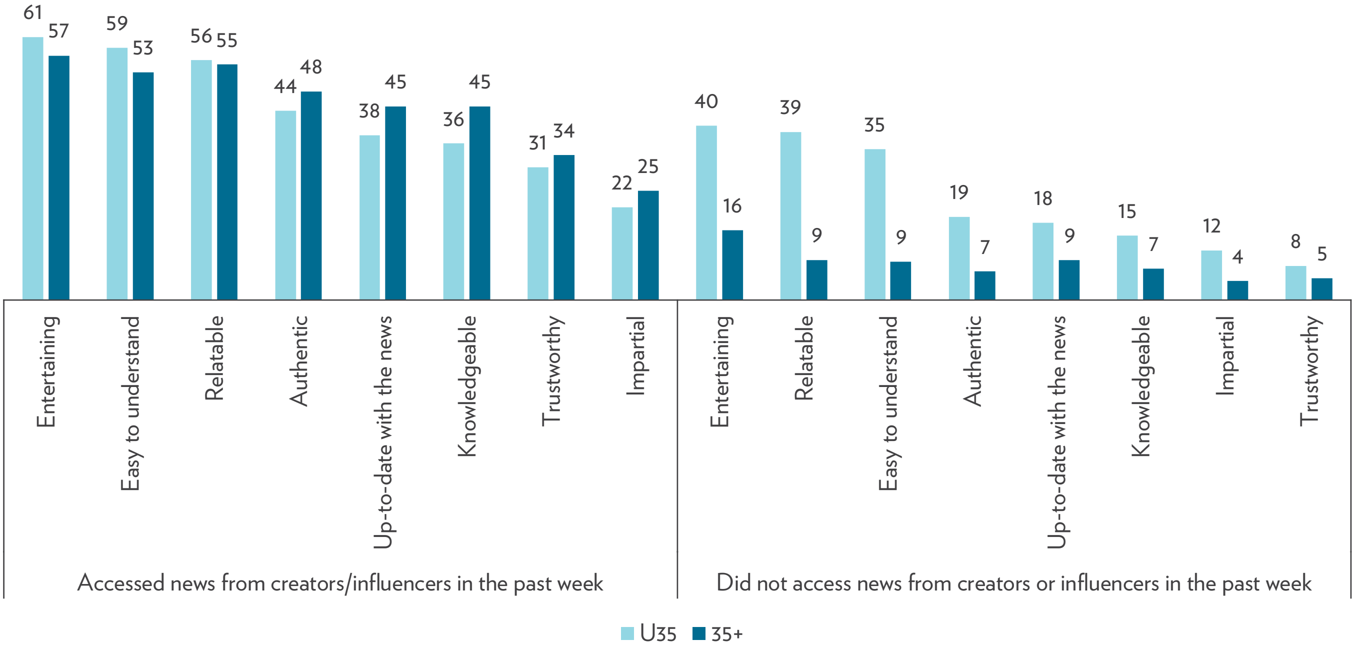
[Base: *n* = 1,917] *Excludes those who said 'don't know' to **[Q_Creators1_2026]**. Question wording: In the last week, have you consumed news from any of the following? Accessed news = Individual creators or influencers who mainly focus on news + Individual creators or influencers who mainly post about other topics but sometimes talk about the news; Did not access news = None of these; Don't know = Excluded.

U35s find news creators and influencers entertaining, easy to understand and relatable

Generally, those under 35 are more likely to find value in news creators or influencers. Among those who get news from creators or influencers, under 35s are more likely than older people to say news influencers are more entertaining (61%) and easy to understand (59%) than traditional news media. However, over 35s who get news from influencers are more likely than younger people to say influencers are more authentic (48%), up-to-date with the news (45%) and knowledgeable (45%).

Notably, even among those who don't access news from influencers, under 35s are still more likely to perceive them as being more entertaining (40%), relatable (39%) and easy to understand (35%) than traditional news media (see **figure 4.18**). This likely reflects the higher popularity of creators and influencers among young and light news consumers.

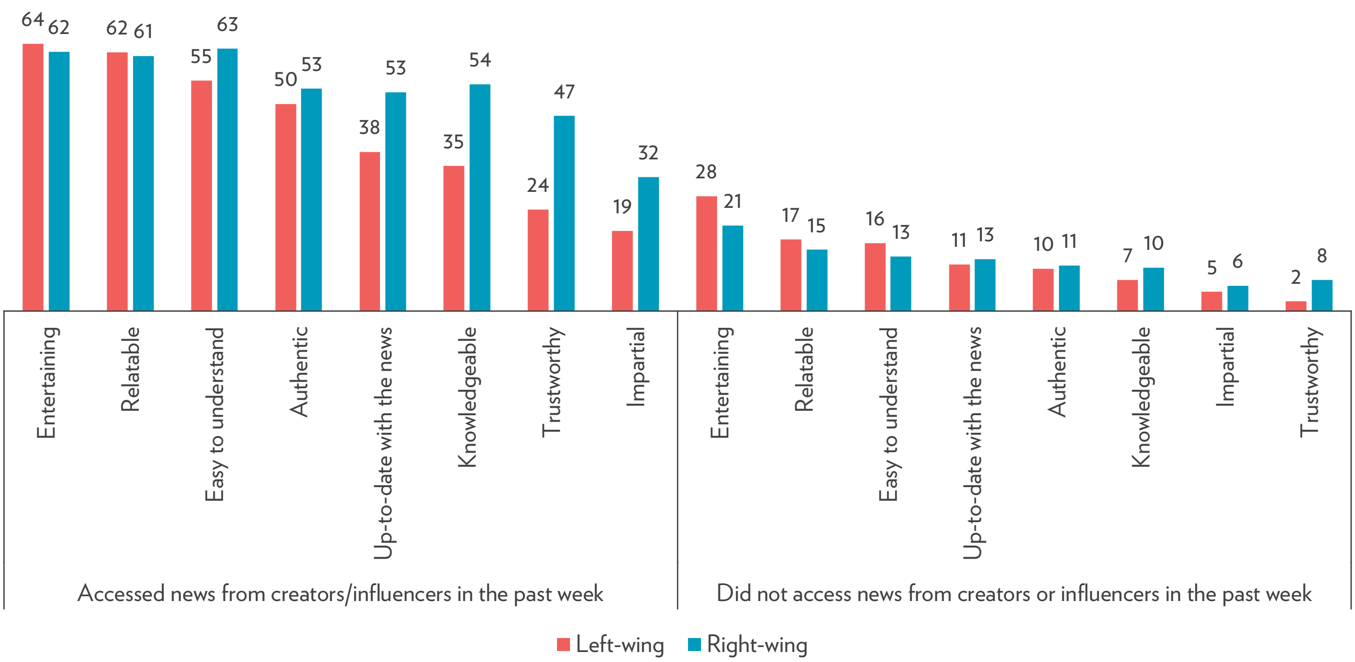
Figure 4.18: Value of news creators/influencers by age (% more)



Right- and left-wing users of news creators and influencers value them for different reasons

In general, regardless of political orientation, those who access news from influencers are more likely to see them as valuable. Left-wing and right-wing respondents are around equal in saying the find creators and influencers to be more entertaining (64% and 62%) and relatable (62% and 61%) than traditional news media. However, right-wing news influencer users are more likely than left-wing to say they find these creators more up-to-date with the news (53% vs. 38%), knowledgeable (54% vs. 35%) and trustworthy (47% vs. 24%). In terms of trust, right-wing users are almost twice as likely than left-wing (47% vs. 24%) to say influencers are more trustworthy than traditional news (see **figure 4.19**).

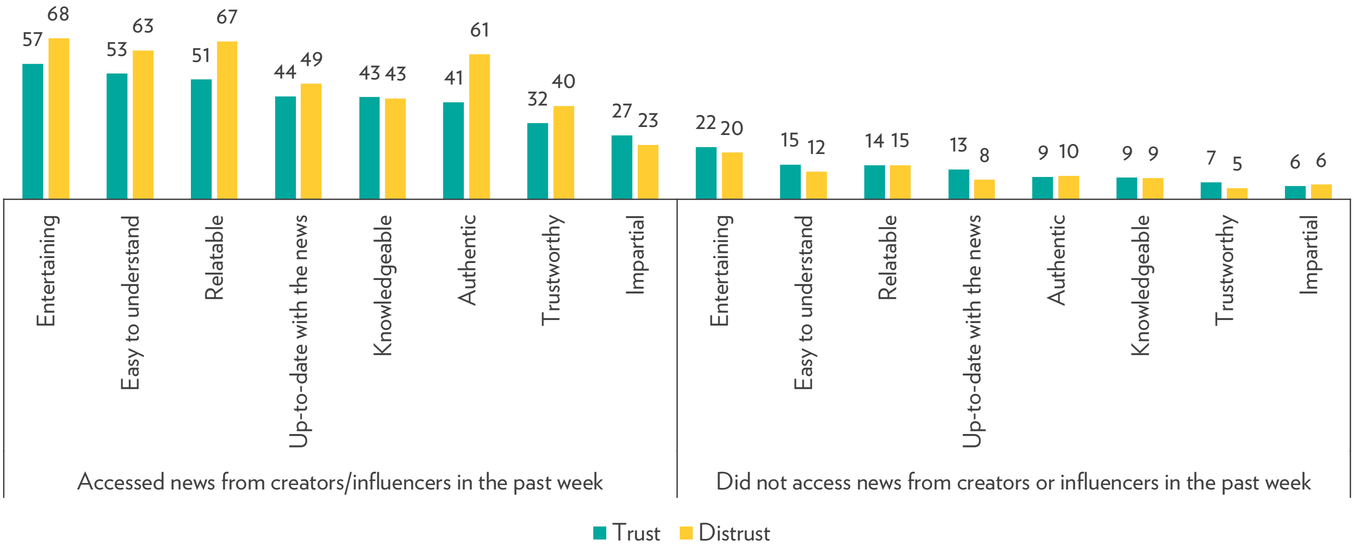
Figure 4.19: Value of news creators/influencers by political orientation (% more)



News distrusters see creators and influencers as being more relatable, easier to understand and more authentic than traditional news

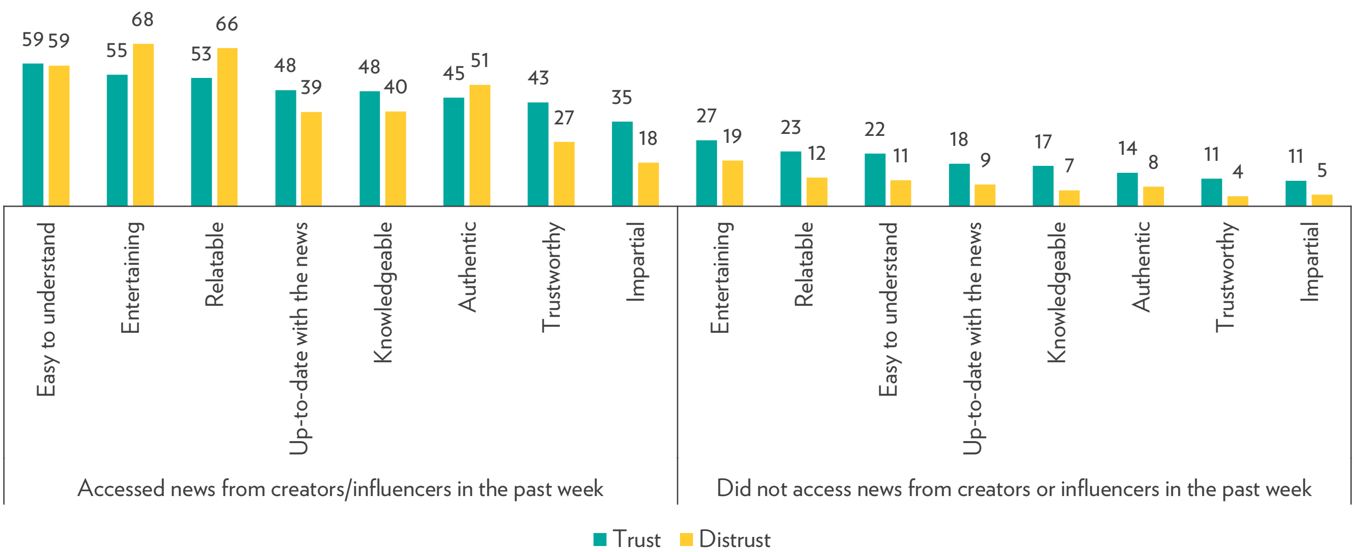
Trust appears to play a role in drawing news audiences towards creators or influencers. Those who trust the news generally are less likely to say news influencers are better than traditional news media. Instead, it is those who distrust news who are more likely to say influencers are more entertaining (68%), easy to understand (63%) and relatable (67%) than traditional media. Those who distrust news are more likely to say influencers are more trustworthy (40%) than traditional news media than those who trust it (32%). Authenticity also reveals a big gap, with 41% of those who trust news saying influencers are more authentic, compared to 61% of those who distrust news (see **figure 4.20**). Among people who don't use influencers for news, there is little difference in the perceptions of trusters and distrusters.

Figure 4.20: Value of news creators/influencers by trust in news (%)



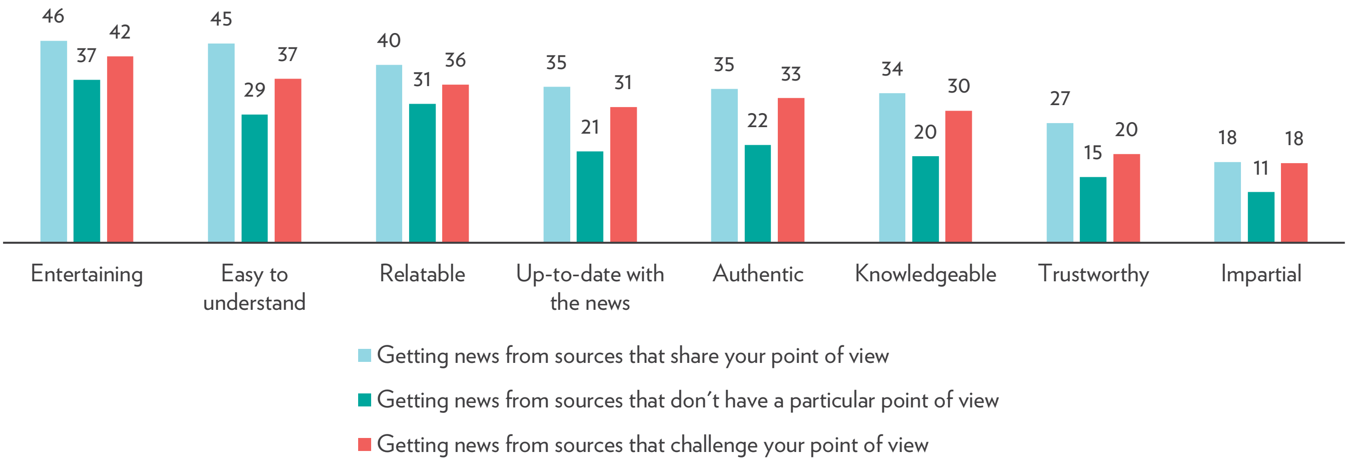
Those who trust and distrust news on social media express different views. For trustworthiness, there is an inverse relationship to the one described above. Those who trust news on social media (43%) are more likely than those who distrust news on social media (27%) to say creators and influencers are more trustworthy than traditional news media. However, the earlier pattern of distrusters finding influencers to be more entertaining or relatable is consistent (see **figure 4.21**).

Figure 4.21: Value of news creators/influencers by trust in news on social media (%)



Preference for point of view in news is linked to the perceived value of creators and influencers over mainstream news brands. For example, those who prefer news that takes a point of view are more likely to say creators and influencers are more entertaining (46%), easy to understand (45%) and relatable (40%) compared to mainstream news, while those who prefer news that does not take a position are less likely to agree (37%; 29%; 31%). Notably, those who prefer news that shares or challenges their point of view are more likely to say news influencers are more authentic, knowledgeable, trustworthy and impartial than mainstream news, compared to those who want news to be impartial (see **figure 4.22**).

Figure 4.22: Value of news creators/influencers by preference for point of view in news (%)



We asked the participants which creators or influencers they follow. Respondents could give up to three names. A total of 392 individuals or organisations were named by those who access news from news-focused creators and influencers, and 330 were named by those who access news from creators or influencers who occasionally talk about news. The results reveal a fragmented market with a wide range of creators and influencers people are accessing for news.

The top ten names are in **table 4.1**. Jordan Shanks-Markovina (friendlyjordies) ranked first in both groups. We note that while friendlyjordies is named the top creator or influencer, it was only chosen by 24 and 23 participants. There are also other duplications in the lists with Abbie Chatfield and Joe Rogan. Many names were not of individuals, but of mainstream news organisations, journalists, or politicians. We excluded news brands from the lists but kept any named individuals.

Table 4.1: Count of top creators/influencers named

Creators/influencers who mainly focus on the news	n	Country of origin
Jordan Shanks-Markovina (friendlyjordies)	24	AUS
Laura Tingle	13	AUS
Michael West	13	AUS
Philip DeFranco	13	US
Dylan Page (News Daddy)	10	UK
Meidas Brothers	10	US
Abbie Chatfield	9	AUS
Joe Rogan	9	US
Topher Field	9	AUS
Ben Shapiro	8	US

Creators/influencers who mainly post about other topics but sometimes talk about the news	n	Country of origin
Jordan Shanks-Markovina (friendlyjordies)	23	AUS
Mr. Beast	16	US
Marques Brownlee	16	US
Abbie Chatfield	13	AUS
Elon Musk	13	US
Casey Neistat	10	US
Joe Rogan	9	US
Lilly Singh	8	CAN
Emma Chamberlain	8	US
Ethan Marrell (Ozzy Man)	6	AUS

[Base: *n* = 587, respondents who access news via news creators/influencers; n = 561, respondents who access news via creators/influencers who occasionally talk about news]

SUMMARY

As social media grows as a main source of news, many Australians are turning to creators and influencers as sources of information and commentary on current affairs. Unsurprisingly, younger people are more likely to be accessing news from influencers and creators than older. Those living in a city and on a lower income are also more likely to get their news this way, two variables often associated with a younger demographic. Twice as many people who trust news on social media, as opposed to distrust, use creators or influencers. It is also the case that those who do not trust mainstream news are more likely to turn to creators and influencers to keep up to date.

The data clearly show that some news consumers are attracted to creators and influencers because they find them to be more entertaining, relatable, easy to understand and authentic than mainstream news brands. Additionally, those who seek out creators and influencers for news prefer their news sources to share or challenge their point of view rather than have no point of view at all. While left-wing respondents are more likely to be using creators and influencers as a source of news, right-wing respondents are more likely to view them as more trustworthy and impartial than mainstream news brands.

However, it is important to note that more than half of respondents who access news via influencers say that only some of their news needs are met by them. This suggests that influencers are only one part of most people's news diets, and consumers are also getting news from mainstream and traditional brands.

More research is needed to better understand who Australians regard to be news creators and influencers. People might not make a distinction between those who focus on news and those who touch on news occasionally. When we asked respondents who they followed, hundreds of individuals, channels, and influencer collaborations were named highlighting a very fragmented audience for this type of news content. Consumers are clearly searching for entertaining, relevant and authentic news and are willing to go beyond traditional news brands to get it.

Many of the top ranked individual creators and influencers nominated by participants are delivering Australian news indicating people's desire for localised news. However, the highly fragmented nature of this market also means the quality of the news provided is not guaranteed. The main take-away from this data is that Australian news outlets need to decide whether they should compete with news influencers within the attention economy, or foster their own from within their ranks of journalists and opinion writers. For many younger Australians, influencers are a major source of news and information, and this is a trend that is unlikely to change.

COMMENTARY

NEWS CREATORS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEGACY MEDIA

Edward Hurcombe, Senior Lecturer, RMIT University

News creators are now an established element of Australia's news ecosystem. Findings from this year's *Digital News Report: Australia* demonstrate that they are a significant news source for many Australians, especially young ones. In many respects, the findings from this year's report are not surprising.

They reflect trends identified in previous reports, including the global findings compiled by the Reuters Institute last year. Also unsurprising is the central role of authenticity and relatability in these trends — as well as how, for many survey respondents, their news diet is not restricted to just Australian creators. Instead, we can see that Australians are sourcing their news and commentary from a variety of national and international creators.

These findings would likely be concerning for legacy media. Indeed, last year's budget lock-up — where creators were invited to preview the federal budget alongside journalists from Australia's legacy outlets — demonstrated the unease that some incumbents are feeling towards the rise of news creators. There are legitimate reasons for such concerns.

The largely unregulated platform environment in which news creators flourish can be a space for free expression and alternative perspectives.

This is especially important within a historically concentrated media market such as Australia's. It is also crucial during a time when some journalists are feeling unable to express their views or report freely on topics such as Palestine. But this unregulated environment can also enable problematic voices: from vaccine-sceptic influencers to partisan commentators. Findings from this report showing that only 1 in 5 highly-educated people find news creators impartial suggests that some audiences also share these apprehensions.

Yet, the rise of news creators also presents opportunities for legacy media. It shows that entertaining, authentic, and relatable content does not need to compete with news — instead, these formats can be blended together. And news outlets, for some time now, have been experimenting with such blended formats.

We can see examples of this from Guardian Australia's long-time social video journalist Matilda Boseley, who creates colourful, conversational, and often comedic 'explainer' news content. The ABC has also been producing similar content for its TikTok and Instagram accounts, by incorporating the informal aesthetics of vertical video with news reporting. This corresponds with developments overseas. The *Washington Post* has for several years been producing skit-based news content for its TikTok. One of the *Post*'s creators, Dave Jorgenson, even became famous enough that he has since gone independent.

And news organisations are increasingly trying to court creators into their newsrooms. This includes CNN's 'CNN Creators', the ABC's 'Creator Program', and the BBC's 'Creator Lab'. Whether this is a fad like the infamous 2010s 'pivot to video' remains to be seen. But it does demonstrate how the 'news creator' story can miss the ways in which newsrooms are experimenting with their journalism.

The appeal of 'authenticity' and 'relatability' also presents opportunities for legacy media, especially during a time characterised by a crisis in trust.

This desire for authenticity could be dismissed as frivolous — as a fashionable aesthetic or a misunderstanding of journalism's 'objective' purpose. But it can also indicate a desire for transparency and honesty. Transparency about the processes of making news, and honesty around the values that guide those processes. We can see some innovative digital outlets embracing this kind of transparency.

The *Daily Aus*, for instance, regularly explains its editorial decision making on its podcast. Multiplatform journalists from the ABC are also doing similar things. A notable example is ABC reporter Claudia Long, whose daily Instagram travel diaries for the 2025 Federal election provided an informal insight into the often arduous work that goes into producing round-the-clock campaign coverage.

News creators are fundamentally ambivalent actors who present both challenges and opportunities for legacy media. These challenges are indeed serious and should not be ignored, and platforms could and should be held responsible for enabling some of the more problematic news creators. But the often-under-reported story of the rise of news creators are the opportunities that this moment can bring, for legacy media and journalists more broadly.

COMMENTARY

IN ORDER TO ESCAPE THE 'INFLUENCER' TROPE, WE NEED TO DEFINE NEW MEDIA AND GET MORE JOURNALISTS ONBOARD

Hannah Ferguson, Chief Executive Officer, Cheek Media Co.

'Well, you don't interview like Sarah Ferguson on 7.30 — do you?"

When I think of the perception gap between legacy and new media, this is the remark that comes to mind. It's a common quip from media figures attempting to distinguish between a journalist and a content creator. The question offers no interrogation of the broader shift in how news is delivered, who is trusted to speak on it and how people receive information. The insinuation is that legacy media is serious, and new media is superficial. What a sad generalisation used to undermine a topic that should excite us all.

In this attention economy, how can new media and creators offer different conversations, new avenues of political engagement and invite us to diversify our media diet?

Of course, we must have standards for those we consume news from, but let's remember — new media players emerged because we felt many mainstream outlets had abandoned them. As illustrated in this chapter, this new wave resonates with Australians — we are a nation 5% higher than the global average when it comes to engaging with creators and influencers.

Like legacy media, new media exists on a spectrum of quality and has varied offerings. There are investigative journalists breaking stories on Instagram, and commentators reaching more people with a single video than talkback radio hosts did at the height of their careers. To judge the breadth of new media based on the loudest influencer of the day is like assuming every journalist in mainstream media has the same editorial standards as a tabloid publication. It is a bad faith view of how diverse our offering is becoming — we need to kill the mentality that every celebrity that speaks about politics is 'new media' and approach this thriving ecosystem with curiosity about what it could be — if we commit to regulating the entire landscape well. The *Digital News Report: Australia 2026* illustrates some of these core issues and concerns loudly and clearly. Forty percent of Australian news consumers are accessing news from creators and influencers — we need to get this right.

In the year since the 2025 Federal Election, the new media landscape in Australia has flourished. Exceptional journalists are exiting established outlets that are steered by the interests of lobbyists and advertisers. Ette Media, Deepcut News, and Lamestream Media are just three examples of small teams publishing a significant volume of high-quality work for consumers yearning for something they aren't getting from newsrooms they once trusted. When we are talking about the 'new media landscape', these teams should be central to the discussion. Instead, the noise and numbers garnered by a small group are prioritised as the face of the movement. I acknowledge that I sit somewhere in the middle of this complicated puzzle.

While Cheek Media was created as an outlet for progressive commentary, it became a space for my opinions that was considered synonymous with my identity. Over the last two years I've worked to change this, hiring a journalist to come on as Cheek's editor and a partnerships manager to grow this business into a space that commissions hundreds of writers with lived experience and expertise every year. As I approach the uncharted territory of running an independent political campaign, the unprecedented space I'm operating in becomes even more challenging to navigate.

New media suspends the rules, but transparency remains key to growing a trusted audience long term.

Currently, we lack a clear definition of what makes up new and independent media. One of the most intriguing points of this report demonstrates the need for this scope. Participants were asked to provide up to three names of people they follow, distinguishing between (1) those who primarily focus on news and (2) those who talk about other topics with the occasional mention of news. Of the top ten, three people were repeated in both categories — with Jordan Shanks-Markovina (friendlyjordies) topping both lists.

I understand why people identify individual political creators as part of new media, but how do we develop our comprehension of what this offering is? Well, it may rely on new outlets growing to the scale some of these individual commentators have reached. While the data tells us that young people find news creators more entertaining, relatable and authentic, can emerging media news 'brands' garner the same level of trust and reach? Or must we rely on a personality-led, individual connection with our audience to build a dedicated and sustainable subscriber base?

New media is fresh territory we're still building the foundations of. As one of the earliest creators in the sphere, I recognise the responsibility we have to ensure we do not mirror the mistakes of the past. We're getting there. But the notion that people are stuck in their ideological bubbles is also refuted within this report. The data indicates that news consumers are drawn to creators and influencers if they prefer news that either shares their point of view or challenges them.

It isn't necessarily about partisan support, but instead that new media consumers want an authentic feel from someone who honestly breaks down the story, takes a position and stands for something, rather than an anchor reading a teleprompter during the 6pm bulletin.

People are desperate for both connection and disruption. Instead of attacking creators who are thriving in this innovative space, we need existing journalists to meet audiences where they are and see social platforms as an opportunity for their work to be amplified to new readers and viewers.

New media isn't going anywhere. Creators are a core part of this ecosystem. Instead of blaming the people making their own space, harness your own. As we find our footing in this new landscape, there are a lot of us ready to collaborate to increase media literacy and political engagement in our new public square.

We may not all interview exactly like Sarah Ferguson on 7.30, but I'd happily help her reach the next generation with a few engaging reels. We can help each other.

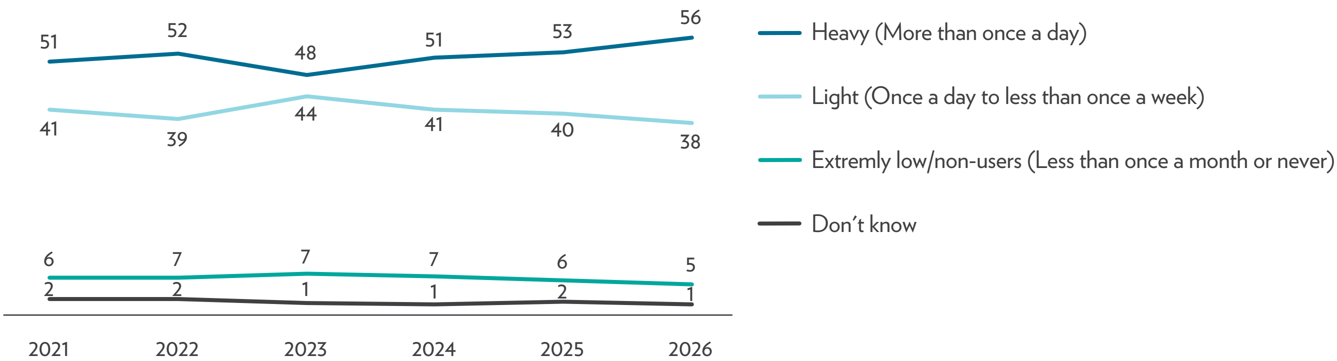
5 NEWS ACCESS

- Heavy news consumption has risen to 56% (+3), with strong growth among 18–24s (49%, +13 from 2023).
- Social media (56%, +9) is now the second most used general source of news, just behind TV (57%) and ahead of online news (52%, +5).
- Smart TV is used by more than half (52%) of Australian to access news.
- Social media (32%, +8) has overtaken direct access (31%, +1) as the main pathway to online news.
- More than one-third (35%, +6) of news consumers access seven or more news brands each week.

Heavy news consumption continues to increase

The proportion of Australians accessing news more than once a day has increased to 56%, up from 53% in 2025. In contrast, only 38% of respondents are light news users. The proportion of those who rarely or never access news has further declined slightly to 5% this year (see **figure 5.1**).

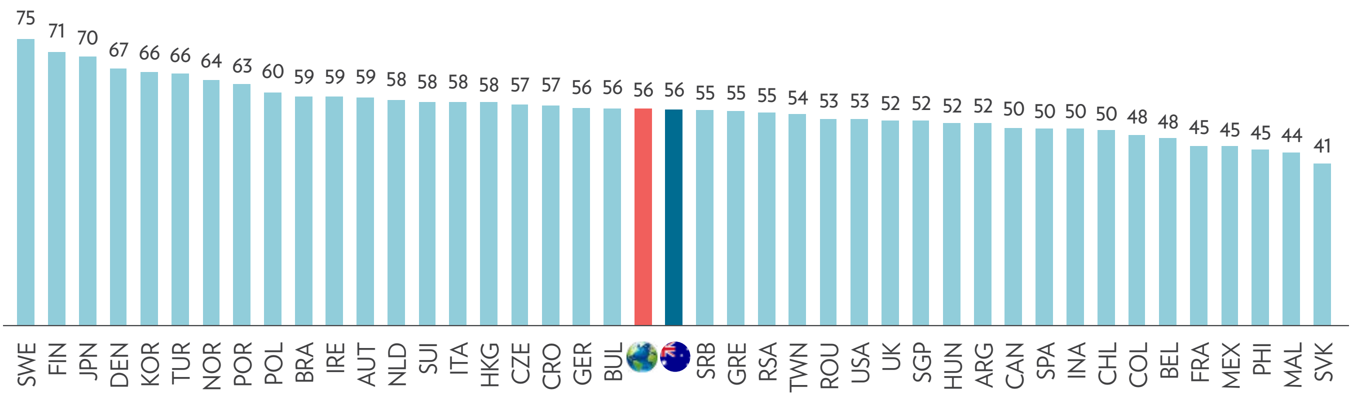
Figure 5.1: News access 2021 – 2026 (%)



[Q1b_NEW] Typically, how often do you access _news_? By news we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper or online).
[Base: *n* = 2,025]

As the proportion of heavy news consumers in Australia increases this year, it remains close to the global average (56%). Globally, news access has declined substantially from 64% in 2021. Countries such as Sweden (75%), Finland (71%), and Japan (70%) continue to have the highest proportion of heavy news consumers (see **figure 5.2**).

Figure 5.2: News access by country (% heavy)

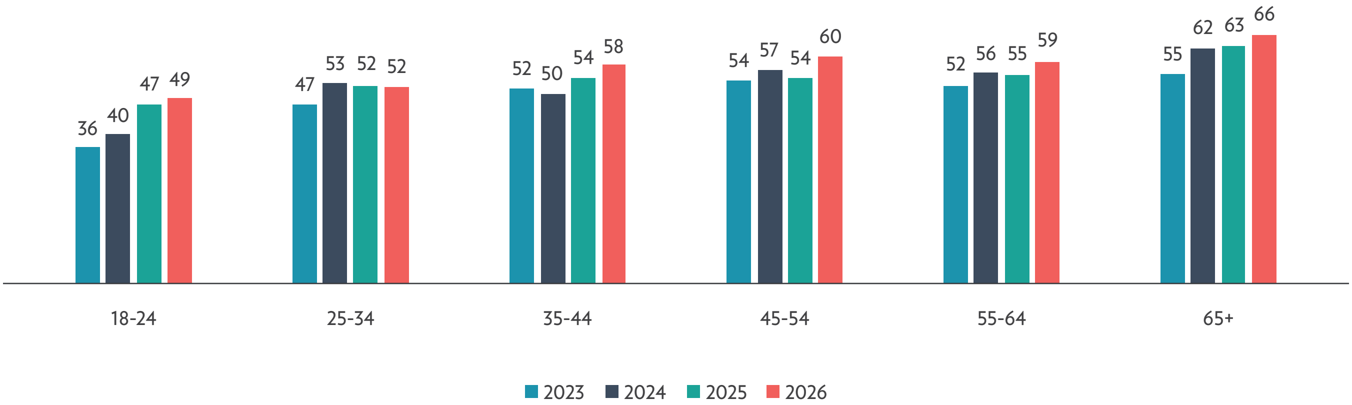


[Base: *n* = 85,384]

Younger audiences and women increase their news consumption

There has been a substantial increase in news consumption among respondents aged 18-24 over the past four years (+13), with almost half of this cohort (49%) accessing news more than once a day. The highest levels of news use are found among those aged 65 and over, with around two-thirds (66%) accessing news more than once a day, compared to younger cohorts (see **figure 5.3**).

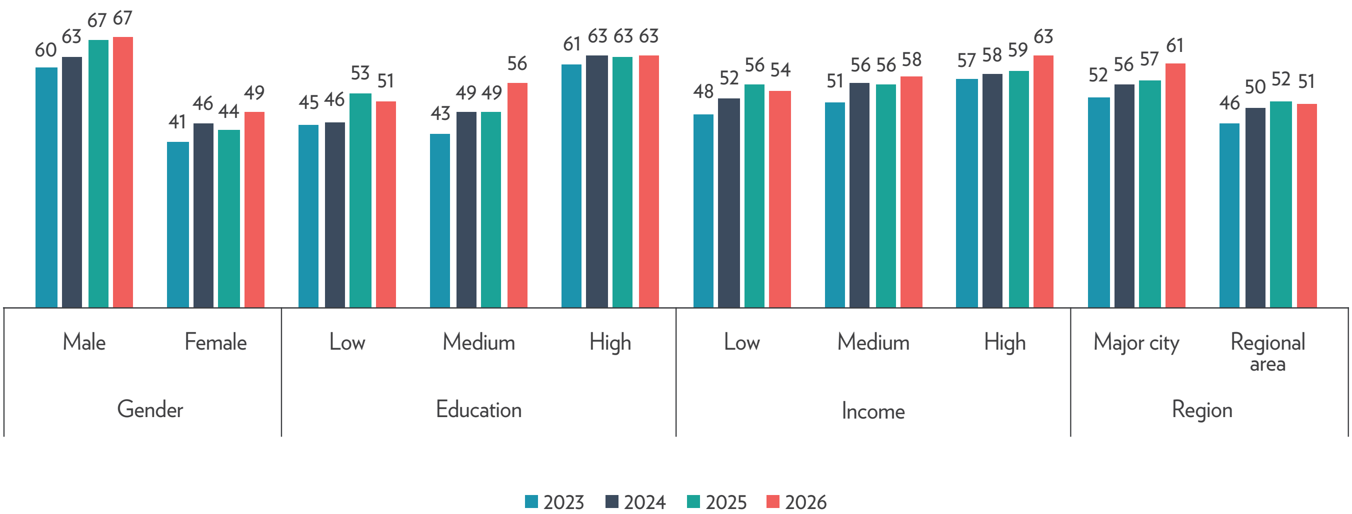
Figure 5.3: News access by age 2023 – 2026 (% heavy)



More than two-thirds of men (67%) are heavy news consumers compared to only one in two (49%) women. However, there has been a noteworthy increase among women over the last year (+5). The proportion of heavy news users remains stable among those with a high education level (63%), while it has increased among those with low and medium levels of education since 2023 (+6, +13 respectively).

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of those with a high level of income are heavy news consumers compared to only 54% of those with low income. City dwellers are more likely to be heavy news consumers (61%) than those in regional areas (51%) (see **figure 5.4**).

Figure 5.4: News access by demographics 2023 – 2026 (% heavy)



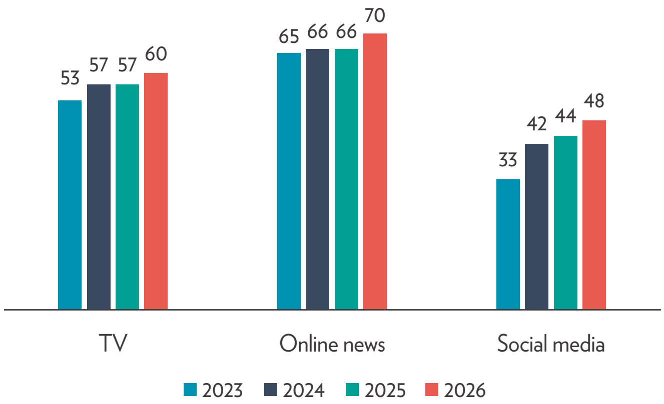
Heavy news use among respondents who mainly access news via social media has increased significantly over the past four years, from 33% in 2023 to 48% in 2026. Those who access news via news websites or apps are the most likely to be heavy news users (70%) (see **figure 5.5**).

Source of news:

TV 57%

Social media 56%

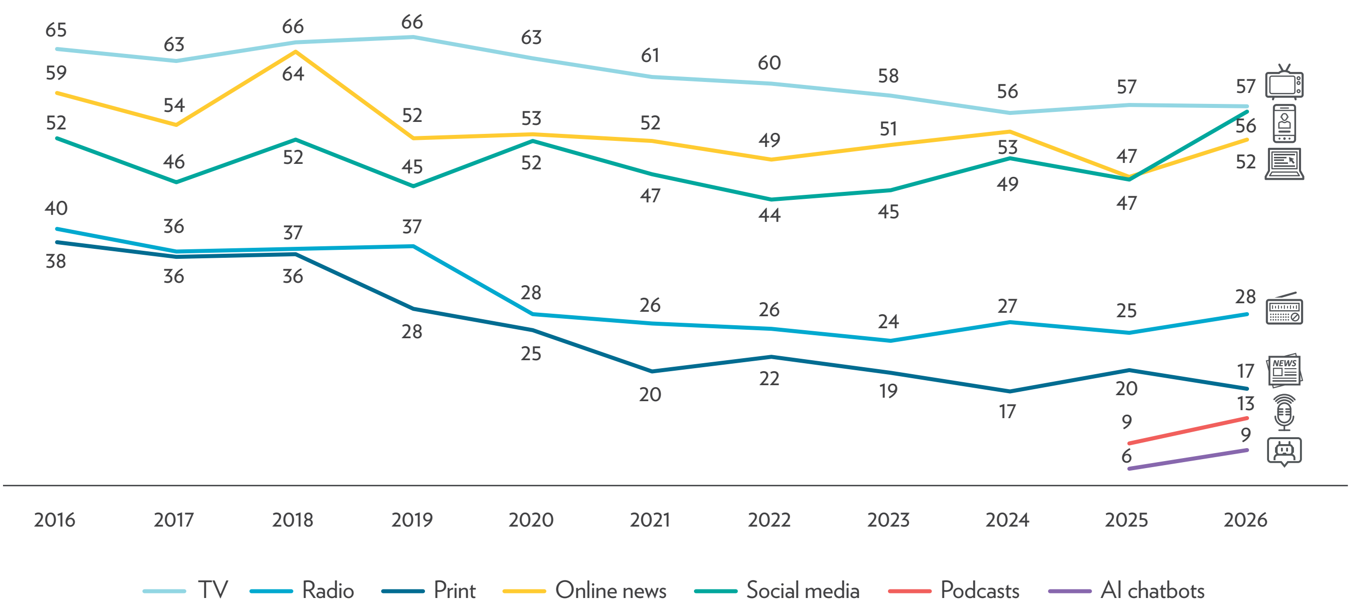
Figure 5.5: News access by main source of news 2023 – 2026 (% heavy)



The majority of Australians now use social media for news

This year, social media is the second most used source of news among Australians (56%), just behind TV news use (57%) and ahead of online news use (52%). Radio news use has increased slightly to 28% (+3), while print has declined to 17% (-3). The use of podcasts and AI chatbots for news continues to grow, reaching 13% and 9% respectively (see **figure 5.6**).

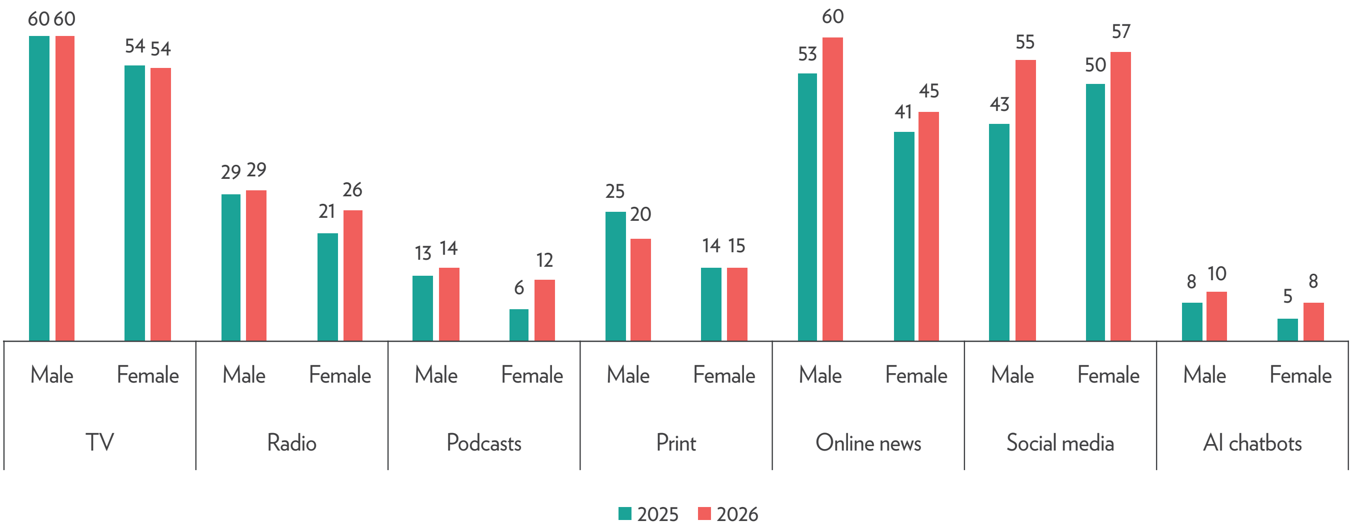
Figure 5.6: General sources of news 2016 – 2026 (%)



[Q3] Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news? Please select all that apply. [Base: *n* = 2,025]

Men are increasingly using social media for news (55%), a rise of 12 percentage points over the past year, compared with 57% of women (+7). The use of online news has increased more among men (60%, +7), compared with women (45%, +4). In contrast, print use has declined among men (20%, -5), while it remains relatively stable among women (15%, +1). Notably, audio news use via radio and podcasts has increased among women, with over a quarter using radio news (26%, +5) and 12% (+6) using news podcasts. Audio news usage among men remains stable (see **figure 5.7**).

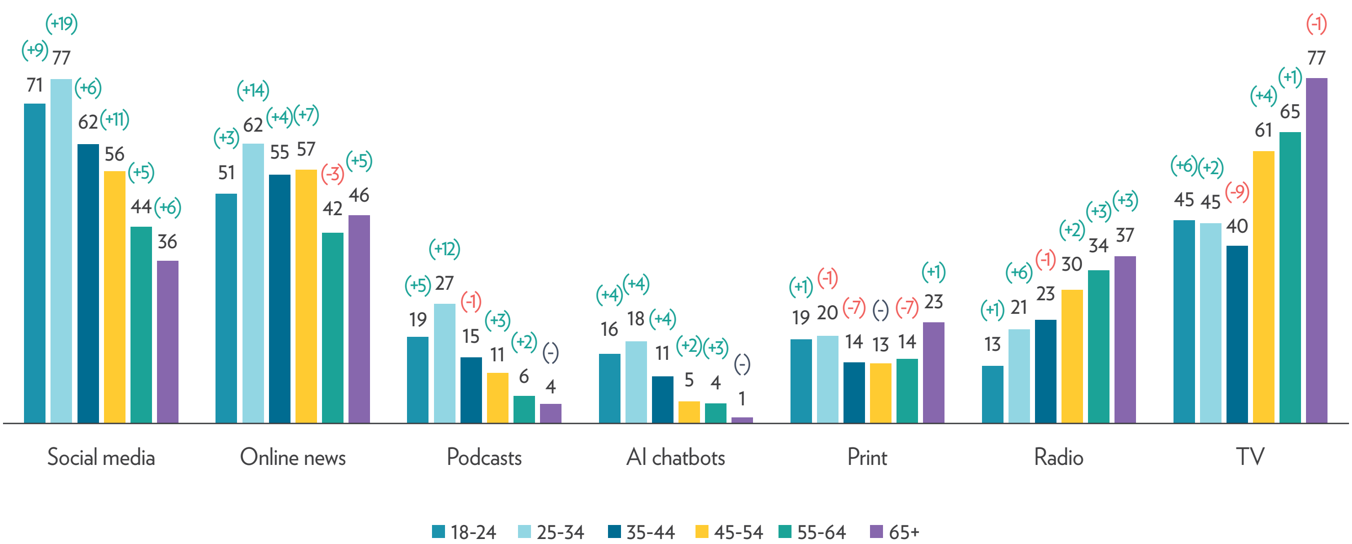
Figure 5.7: General sources of news by gender 2025 – 2026 (%)



Those aged 25-34 are most likely to use online news sources. A large majority of this group (77%) use social media for news, compared to those aged 18-24 (71%), 35-44 (62%), 45-54 (56%), 55-64 (44%) and 65+ (36%). Online news (62%) and podcast (27%) use is also more popular among 25-34s than other age groups.

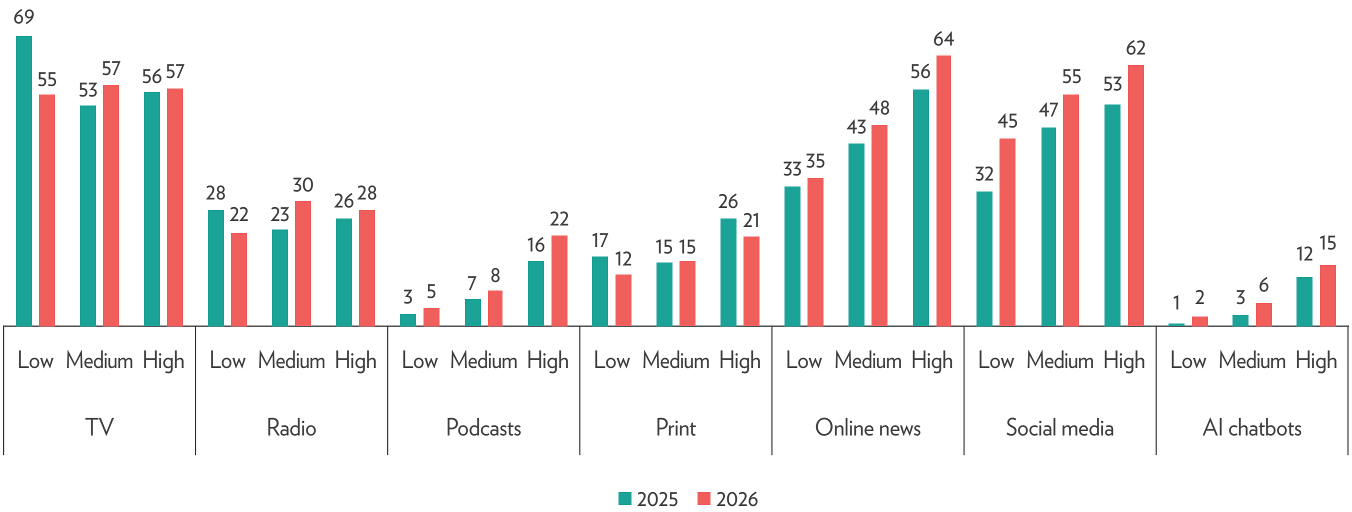
AI chatbot use for news is increasing among younger groups, with 16% of 18-24s and 18% of 25-34s using them for news, compared to lower levels among older groups. In contrast, those aged 65 and over are the most likely to use traditional news sources, including TV (77%), radio (37%) and print (23%) (see **figure 5.8**).

Figure 5.8: General sources of news by age (%)



A significant gap in the use of online news sources – including news websites, social media, podcasts, and AI chatbots – remains across different levels of education. Most respondents with high education use online news (64%) and social media for news (62%), compared to 35% and 45% respectively among those with low levels of education. Similarly, 22% of those with high education use news podcasts and 15% use AI chatbots for news, compared to only 5% and 2% respectively among those with low levels of education. However, the educational gap in the use of traditional news (e.g. TV and radio) is relatively small (see **figure 5.9**).

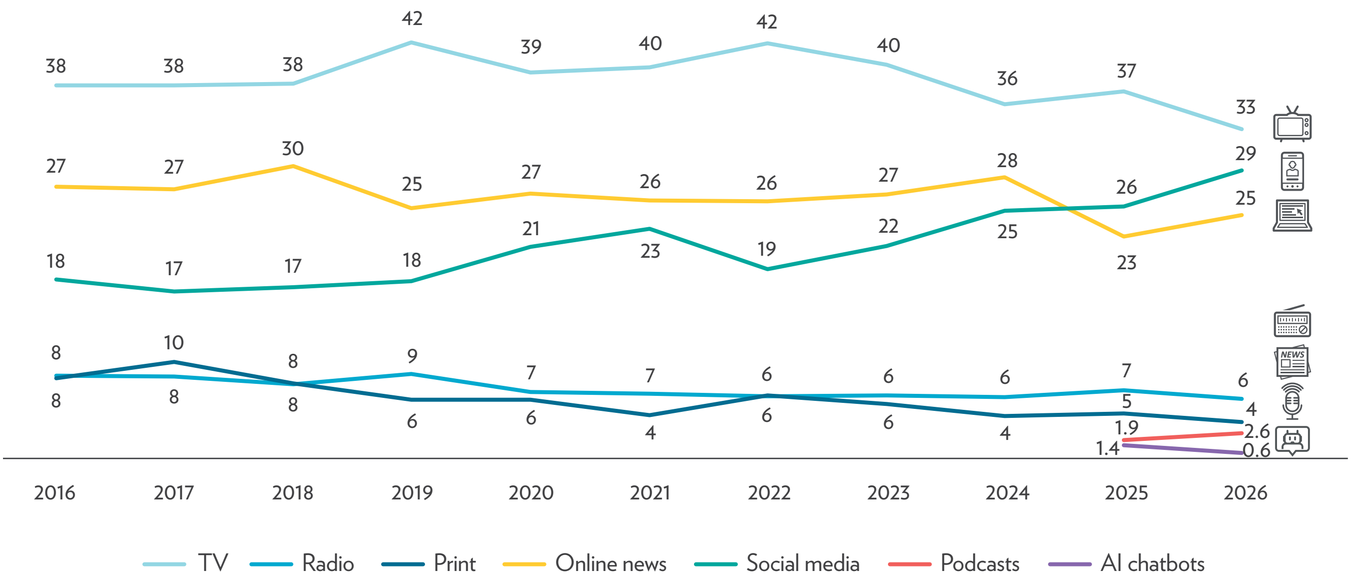
Figure 5.9: General sources of news by education 2025 – 2026 (%)



TV leads, but social media continues to grow as a main source of news[1]

TV remains the most commonly used main source of news (33%), although its use has declined over the past decade (38% in 2016). In contrast, social media continues to grow as a main source of news, reaching 29% this year. Online news has also rebounded, increasing to 25%. Radio (6%) and print (4%) remain relatively stable as main sources of news this year, but both have declined over the past decade (see **figure 5.10**).

Figure 5.10: Main source of news 2016 – 2026 (%)

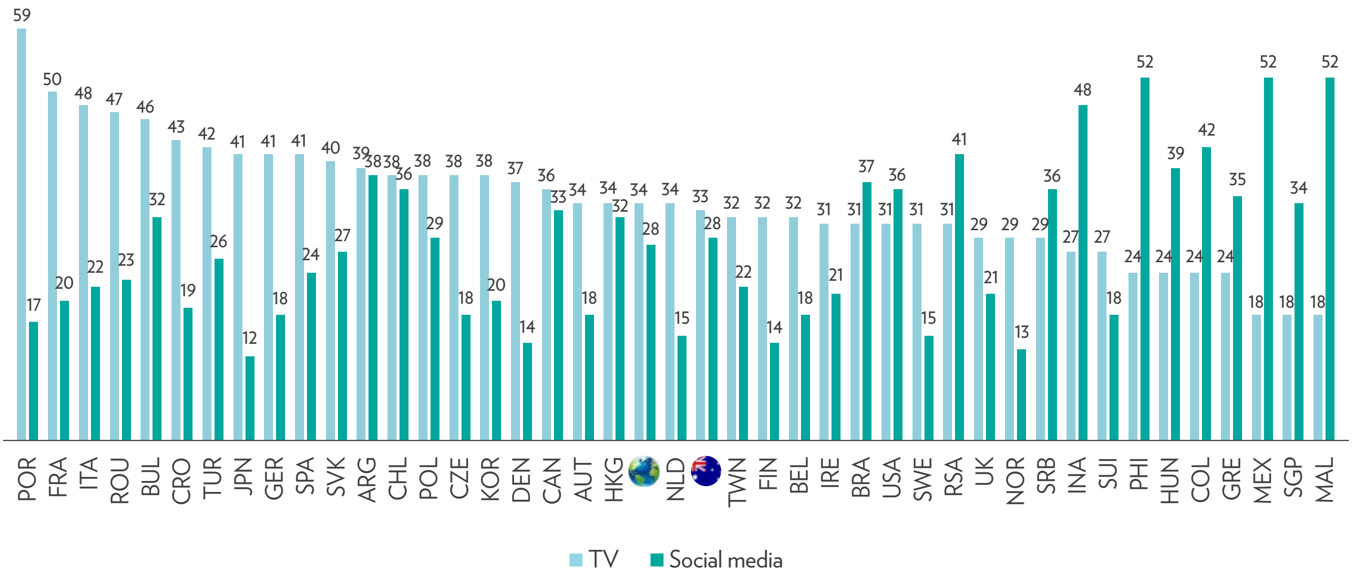


[Q4] You say you've used these sources of news in the _last week_, which would you say is your MAIN source of news? [Base: n = 1,918] *Was not asked to those who say 'None of these' to [Q3]

[1] Due to the small count of radio and print as the main source of news, we excluded them in some of the analysis.

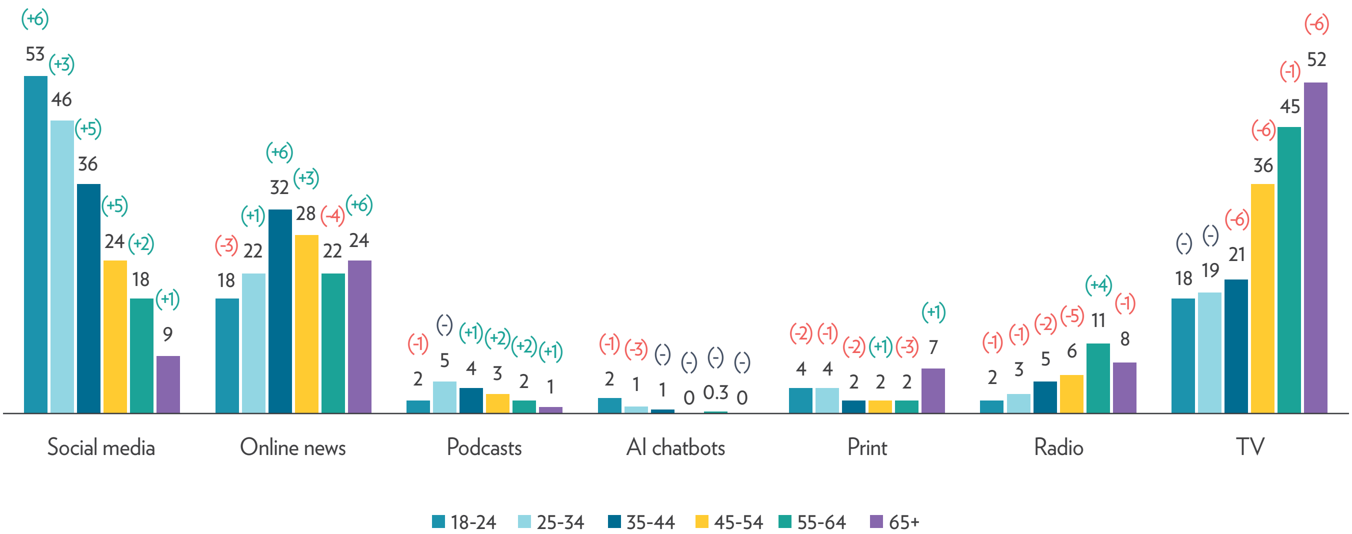
Compared to other countries, Australia is similar to the global average in using TV (34%) as their main source as well as social media (28%). In countries such as Portugal (59%) and France (50%), TV remains much more dominant, while in Malaysia (52%), Mexico (52%) and the Philippines (52%), social media is more prominent as a main source (see **figure 5.11**).

Figure 5.11: TV and social media as main sources of news by country (%)



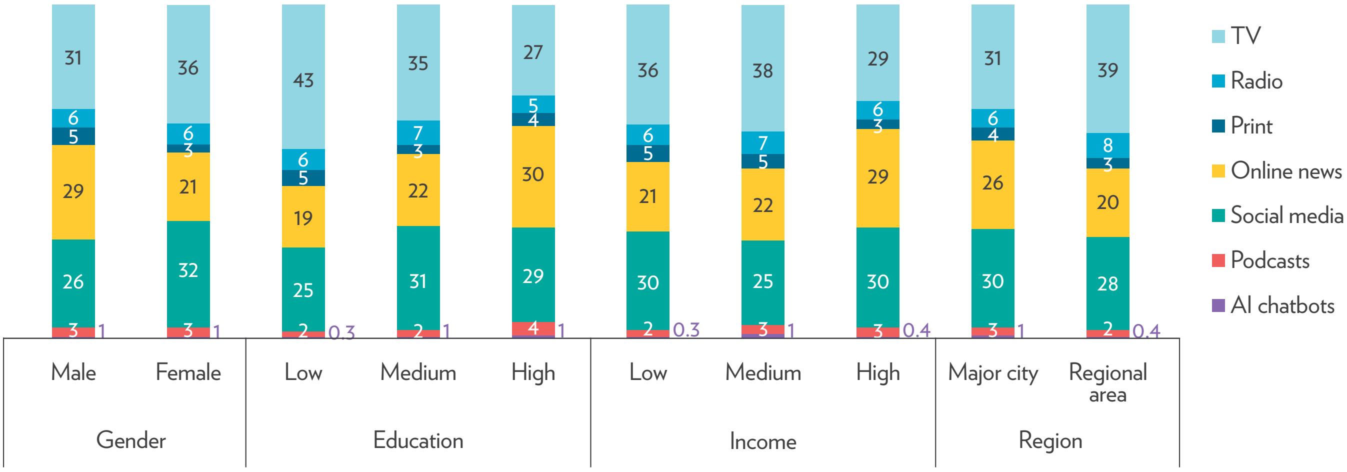
More than half of young people aged 18-24 (53%) say their main source of news is social media. A similar percentage of 65+ say their main sources of news is TV (52%). Online news is most popular as a main source among those aged 35-44, but least popular among those aged 18-24 (see **figure 5.12**).

Figure 5.12: Main source of news by age (%)



Women are more likely than men to report TV (36% vs 31%) and social media (32% vs 26%) as their main sources of news. On the other hand, men are more likely to say online news (29% vs 21%) is their main source. There is no gender difference in the use of radio, podcasts and AI chatbots as main sources of news (see **figure 5.13**).

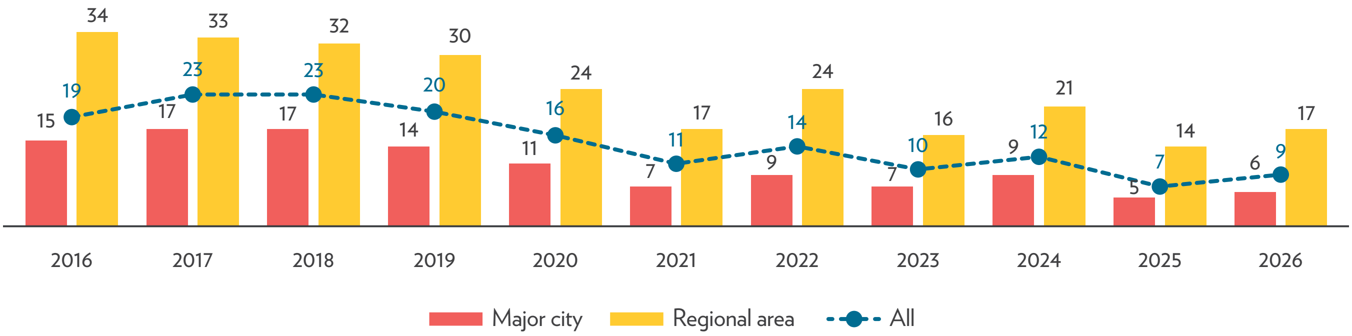
Figure 5.13: Main source of news by demographics (%)



There is a gradual increase in regional news online

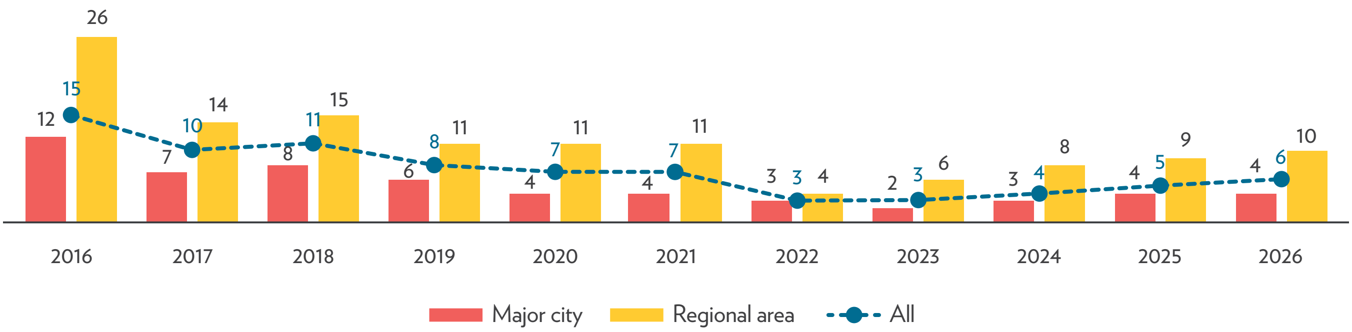
This year, regional or local newspaper use increased slightly to 9% (+2). Regional audiences have increased their consumption by 3 percentage points to 17% from last year (see **figure 5.14**). Use of regional or local newspaper websites has been increasing since 2022, reaching 10% among regional consumers (see **figure 5.15**). This suggests a gradual shift towards online access to regional and local news.

Figure 5.14: Regional or local newspaper use 2016 – 2026 (%)



[Q5A] Which of the following brands have you used to access news **offline** in the last week (via **TV, radio, print, and other traditional media)?** Regional or local newspaper [Base: *n* = 2,025]

Figure 5.15: Regional or local newspaper website use 2016 – 2026 (%)



[Q5B] Which of the following brands have you used to access news **online** in the last week (via **websites, apps, social media, and other forms of Internet access**)? Other regional or local newspaper website[Base: *n* = 2,025]

NEWS BRANDS

ABC News leads as news brand rankings shift

This year, ABC News (35%) takes the top position, up four percentage points from 2025 (31%), followed by Channel 9 (33%, +2).

Among newspapers, *The Australian* has recorded a noticeable increase (17%, +4) in 2026. Overall, several newspaper brands show slight growth, including *The Sydney Morning Herald*, regional or local newspapers, the *Australian Financial Review*, and *The Age*. Use of other international news brands remains relatively low.

SBS remains stable (14%), while BBC News (14%) has increased slightly (+3). Commercial FM radio news has also increased, reaching 14% (+2).

On the other hand, some TV brands have seen slight declines in their audience reach, including Fox News (8%, -1) and Prime7 (5%, -2) (see **table 5.1**).

Table 5.1: Offline news brands (%)

	n	2026 (%)	2025 (%)	Change (%) from 2025
ABC News*	714	35	31	+4
Channel 9	659	33	31	+2
Channel 7	647	32	34	-2
Sky News	383	19	17	+2
The Australian	350	17	13	+4
Commercial FM radio news (e.g. Triple M, Nova)	288	14	12	+2
BBC News	274	14	11	+3
SBS News*	273	14	14	0
Channel TEN	263	13	13	0
CNN	224	11	10	+1
Herald Sun	202	10	9	+1
The Sydney Morning Herald	200	10	8	+2
A regional or local newspaper	182	9	7	+2
The Daily Telegraph	175	9	10	-1
Fox News	171	8	9	-1
Commercial AM radio news (e.g. 2GB, 2UE)	165	8	8	0
Australian Financial Review	157	8	6	+2
The Age	145	7	5	+2
WIN Television	112	6	6	0
The Courier-Mail	109	5	5	0
Other newspapers or broadcast news channels from outside Australia	102	5	3	+2
Prime7	98	5	7	-2
The Advertiser	91	5	5	0
Other capital city newspapers (Canberra Times, Hobart Mercury, NT News)	77	4	4	0
The Saturday Paper	72	4	4	0
News channels or newspapers in languages other than English	49	2	1	+1

*ABC and SBS News include both TV and radio.

[Q5A] Which of the following brands have you used to access news **offline** in the last week (via **TV, radio, print, and other traditional media)?** [Base: *n* = 2,025]

Percentages are rounded, so changes over time may not always match the exact differences shown.

This year, online news brands have seen noticeable increases in their audience reach. News.com.au and ABC News online are the most widely used online news brands in Australia, each reaching 27% in 2026. Both have seen notable increases from 2025, up 6 and 7 percentage points respectively.

This is followed by 9news.com.au (17%, +2), Guardian Australia online (16%, +5), and Skynews.com.au (16%, +4), all of which have grown over the past year.

BBC News and *The Australian* have also recorded increases in their online audience reach (+4). While SBS TV remains unchanged in overall reach, its online audience has increased (+2) this year.

Some Australia-based digital-native outlets, such as The Daily Aus (7%, +2) and The Conversation (6%, +2), have also grown slightly since last year (see **table 5.2**)

Table 5.2: Online news brands (%)

	n	2026 (%)	2025 (%)	Change (%) from 2025
News.com.au	551	27	21	+6
ABC News online	543	27	20	+7
9news.com.au (or nine.com.au)	347	17	15	+2
Guardian Australia online	331	16	11	+5
Skynews.com.au	322	16	12	+4
7News.com.au	319	16	15	+1
BBC News online	294	15	11	+4
The Australian (theaustralian.com.au)	285	14	11	+4
Sydney Morning Herald online	232	11	9	+2
CNN.com	224	11	9	+2
Daily Mail Australia	196	10	10	0
Australian Financial Review (afr.com)	187	9	6	+3
SBS News online (sbs.com.au)	187	9	7	+2
Herald Sun (heraldsun.com.au)	167	8	7	+1
The Daily Telegraph (dailytelegraph.com.au)	155	8	7	+1
Al Jazeera online	155	8	6	+2
The Age (theage.com.au)	154	8	6	+2
New York Times online	153	8	7	+1
The Daily Aus	139	7	5	+2
The New Daily	135	7	6	+1
The Conversation	126	6	4	+2
Other regional or local newspaper website	120	6	5	+1
The Courier-Mail (couriermail.com.au)	109	5	5	0
Channel TEN online (10play.com.au)	97	5	5	0
PerthNow.com.au	95	5	4	+1
Other online sites from outside Australia	93	5	3	+2
The Advertiser (adelaidenow.com.au)	75	4	4	0
BrisbaneTimes.com.au	74	4	3	+1
The Saturday Paper online	65	3	3	0
Crikey	47	2	3	-1
Other non-English online news sites	28	1	1	0

[Q5B] Which of the following brands have you used to access news **online** in the last week (via **websites, apps, social media, and other forms of Internet access**)? [Base: *n* = 2,025]
Percentages are rounded, so changes over time may not always match the exact differences shown.

Figures 5.16 and **5.17** provide a visual representation of the political orientation of audiences who say they use particular news brands. The brands are plotted on an axis from left-wing to right-wing based on the self-identification of respondents across the political spectrum.

Among offline brands, ABC TV and radio have the highest proportion of left-leaning audiences and Sky News has the highest proportion of right-leaning. Similar to previous years, online audiences are slightly more skewed towards left compared to offline audiences, reflecting the younger composition of the audience. The Conversation has the highest proportion of left-leaning audiences among online brands and Sky News has the highest proportion of right-wing. The spread is wider among online brands, indicating that audiences are more polarised compared to offline audiences.

Figure 5.16: Polarisation in offline news brands

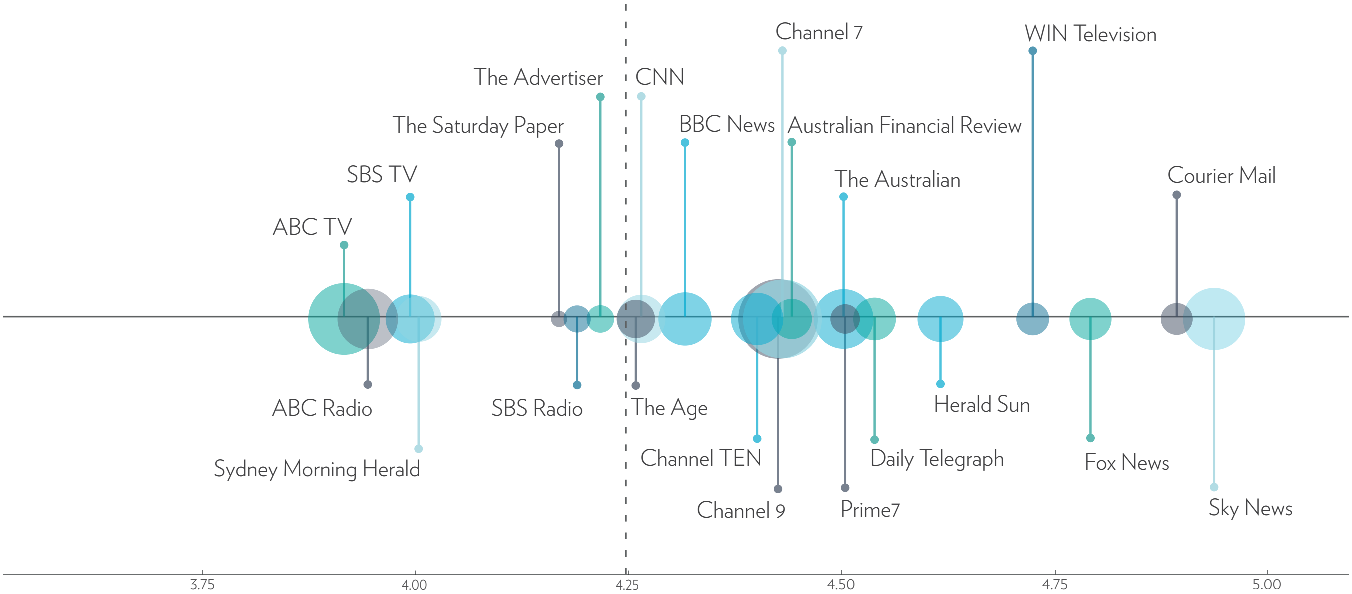
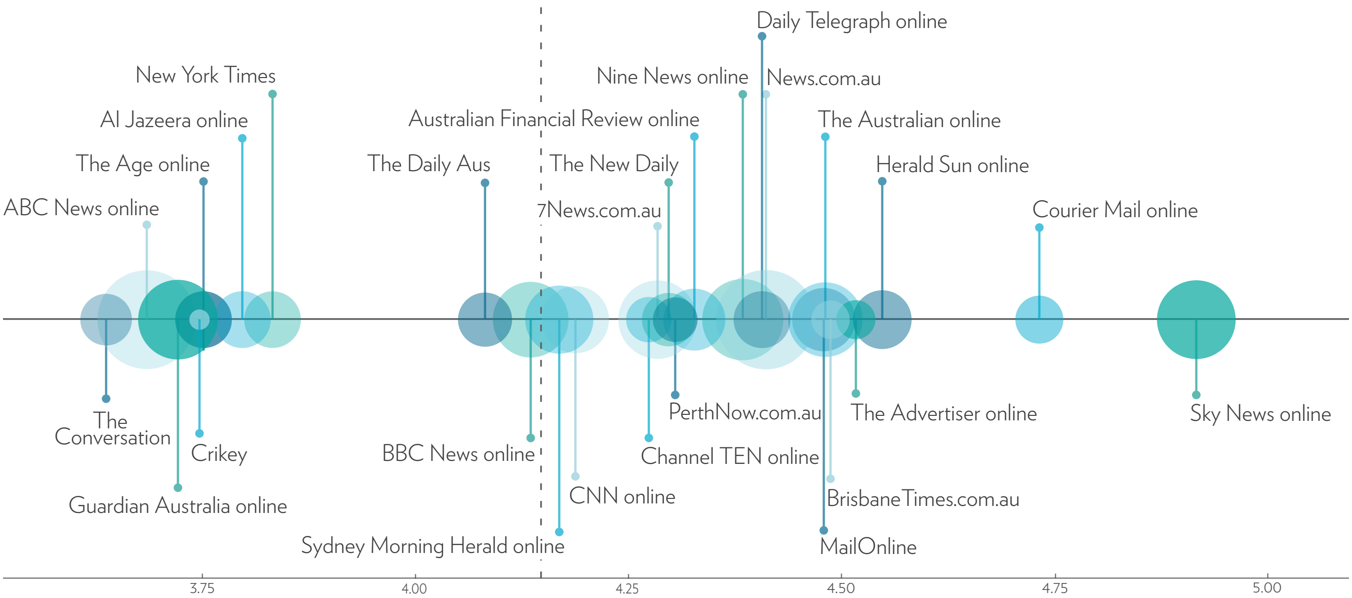


Figure 5.17: Polarisation in online news brands

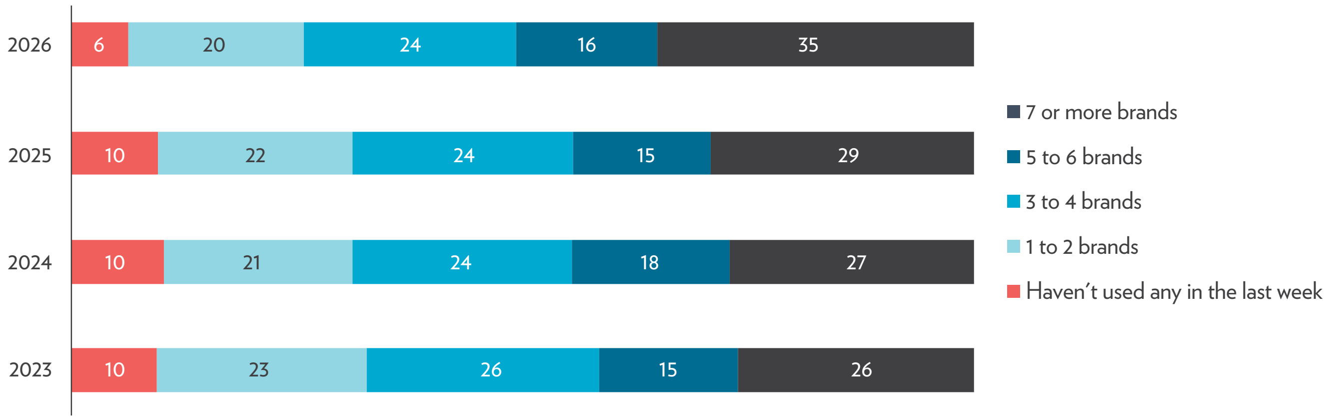


Note: Polarisation charts are based on each brand's audience reach (size of circle), placed on a scale between 1 to 7 based on the distance from the total brands' mean score for each brand. The scale 1 to 7 reflects respondents' self-reports of their political orientation that ranges from 1 'Very left-wing', 2 'Fairly left-wing', 3 'Slightly left-of-centre', 4 'Centre', 5 'Slightly right-of-centre', 6 'Fairly right-wing' and 7 'Very right-wing'. Those who don't know were excluded from the analysis.

Use of multiple news brands continues to grow

Australian news consumers are increasingly accessing a wider range of news brands. **Figure 5.18** shows that more than one-third (35%) report using seven or more news brands in the past week, a six percentage point increase from last year. Meanwhile, the proportion of those who did not use any news brands in the past week declined to 6% (-4).

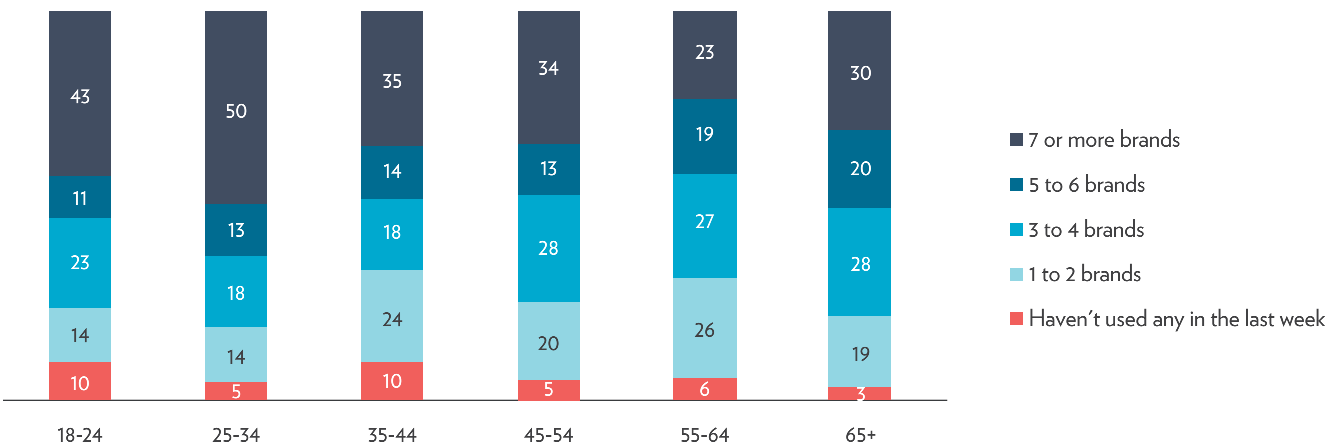
Figure 5.18: Number of news brands accessed 2023 – 2026 (%)



The use of multiple news brands is particularly prominent among younger groups. **Figure 5.19** shows that among those under 35, between 43% and 50% report accessing seven or more news brands in the past week, compared with 23% to 35% of those aged 35 and over.

In contrast, 55-64s are more likely to rely on a smaller number of sources, with 26% reporting that they use only one or two news brands, compared with other age groups.

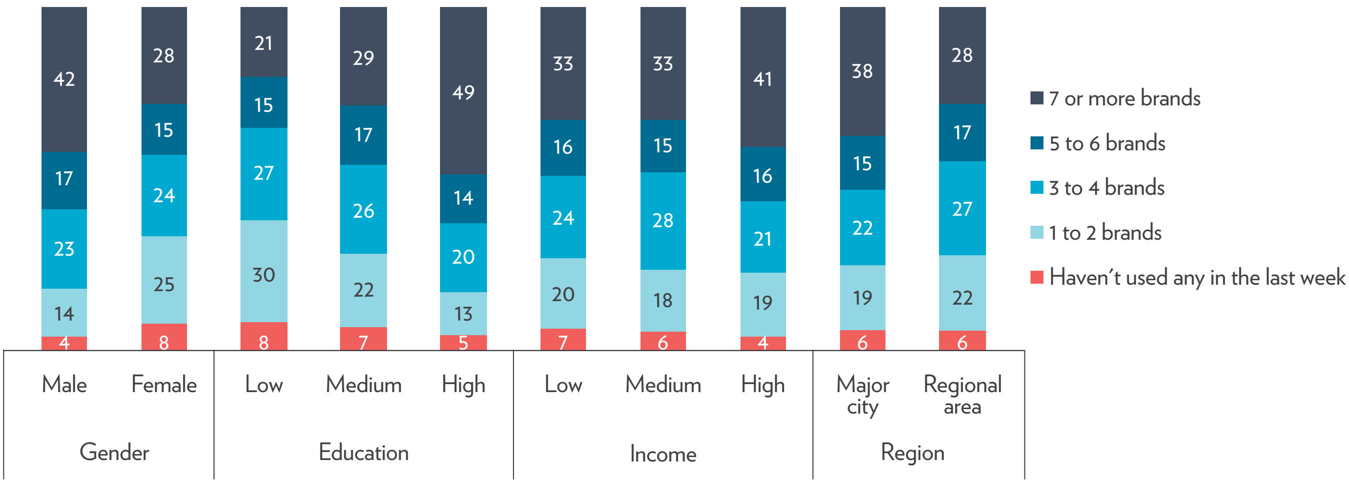
Figure 5.19: Number of news brands by age (%)



Gender, education and income are all associated with the use of multiple news brands. Men (42%), highly educated respondents (49%) and high-income earners (41%) are more likely to report using seven or more news brands in the past week compared to other groups.

Those living in major cities (38%) are also more likely to report using seven or more news brands than those in regional areas (28%). Regional audiences tend to rely on a smaller number of news sources (see **figure 5.20**).

Figure 5.20: Number of news brands by demographics (%)



7+ brands

NEWS

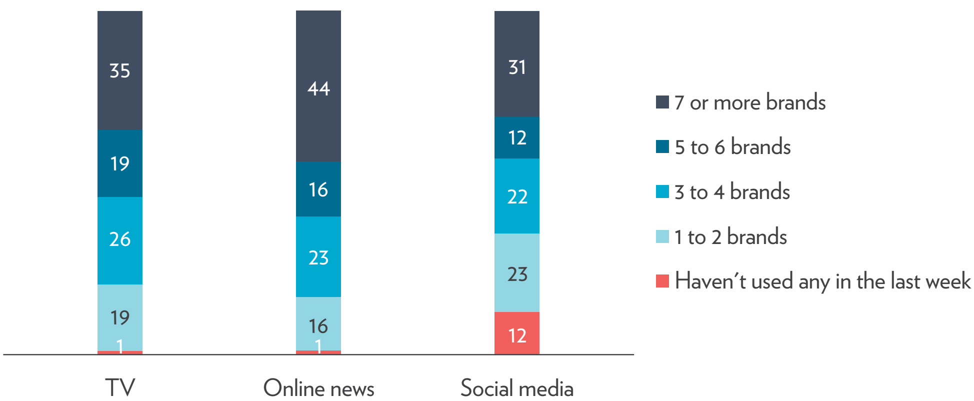
49%
high education

50%
25-34

44%
online news users

Respondents who mainly rely on online news are more likely to use a wider range of news brands than those who rely on other sources. Forty-four per cent report using seven or more news brands in the past week, compared to 31% of those who rely on social media, and 35% of those who rely on TV news (see **figure 5.21**).

Figure 5.21: Number of news brands by main source of news (%)



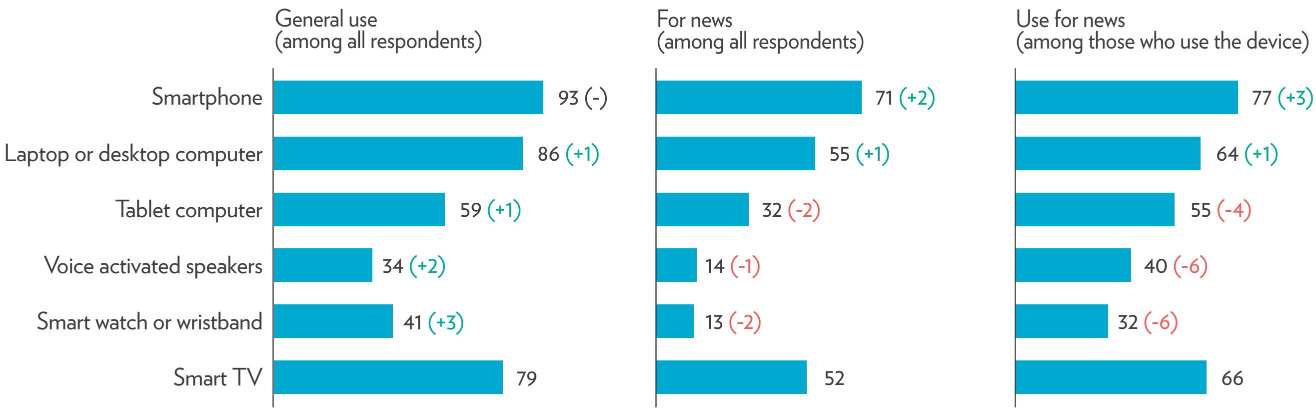
DEVICES FOR NEWS

Smartphones continue to dominate

Smartphones remain the most widely used device (93%). However, the use has largely plateaued. On the other hand, use of some other devices has increased slightly, particularly smartwatches, which has increased to 41% (+3). This year, we asked respondents about their use of smart TVs. More than three-quarters (79%) say they use a smart TV.

When asked about news use, the proportion of respondents using smartphones and PCs remains stable (71%, +2; 55%, +1). More than half (52%) report using smart TVs for news. This year the number of news users has declined among users of tablet PCs (55%, -4), voice-activated speakers (40%, -6) and smartwatches (32%, -6) (see **figure 5.22**).

Figure 5.22: Devices used in general and for news (%)

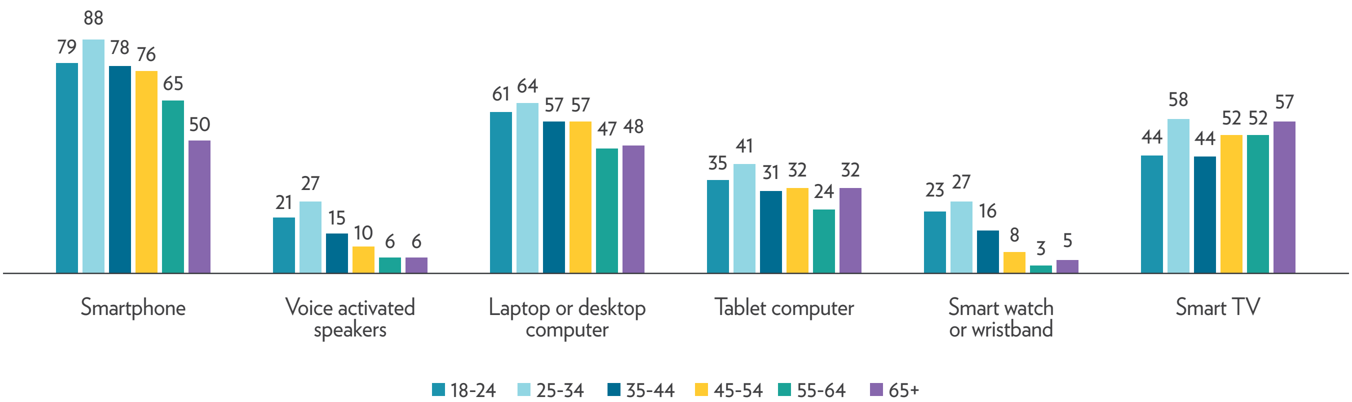


[Q8A_2023_V2] Do you ever use the following device for ANY purpose? **[Q8B_2023_V2]** Have you used the following device to access NEWS _in the last week_? [Base: *n* = 2,025]

Smartphones are the most widely used device for accessing news across all age groups except for those aged over 65. Portable devices, such as smartphones and smartwatches, are more popular among younger respondents than those aged 55 and older. In contrast, smart TVs are most commonly used among older respondents, with 57% of those aged 65 and older using them for news, compared with 44% of 18-24s.

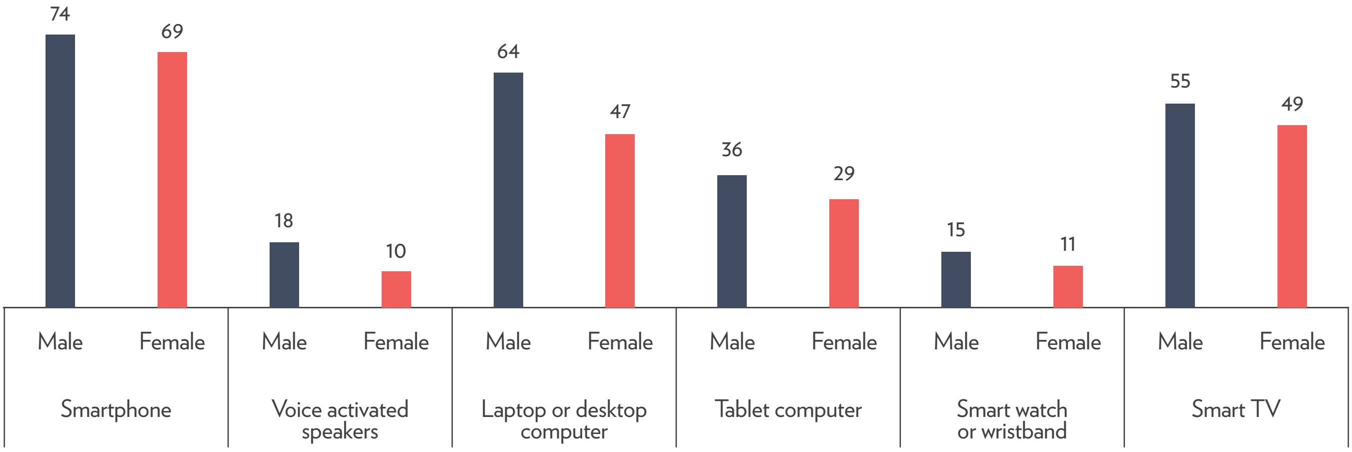
Respondents aged 25-34 are the most likely to access news across a wide range of devices compared with other age groups (see **figure 5.23**)

Figure 5.23: Devices used for news by age (%)



Overall, men report higher use of devices for news than women across most device types (see **figure 5.24**).

Figure 5.24: Devices used for news by gender (%)



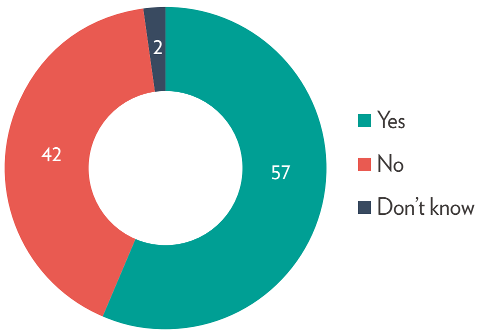
SMART TV FOR NEWS

More than half of smart TV news consumers use video apps for news

This year, we asked respondents who use a smart TV to access news whether they also use video apps for news on their smart TV. Among all respondents 52% reported having used smart TV to get news, of which more than half (57%) used video apps such as YouTube for news (see **figure 5.25**). This is slightly higher than the global average (55%) (see **figure 5.26**).

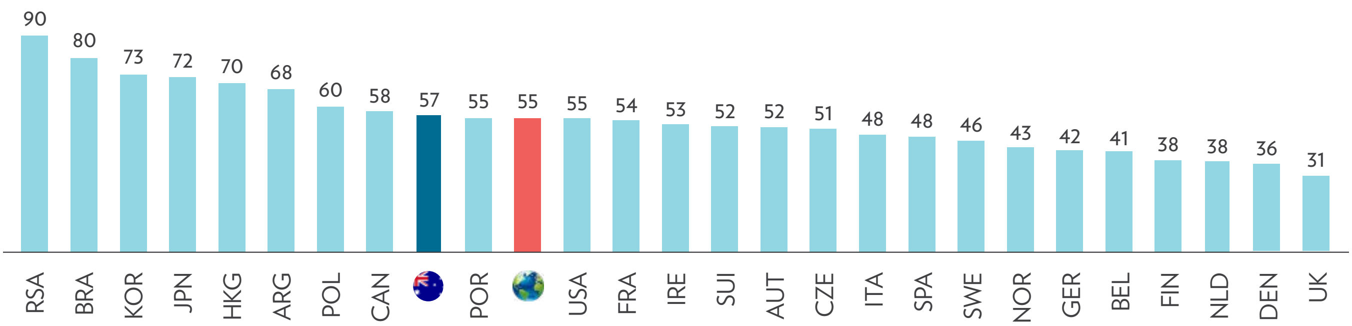
Use smart TV	79%
Use smart TV for news	52%
Use video apps on smart TV for news	29%

Figure 5.25: Video apps on smart TV used for news (% among smart TV users)



[Q_SmartTV1_2026] Earlier in the survey you said you have used a smart TV that connects to the internet to access news in the last week... Did you use video apps (e.g. YouTube) to access news on your smart TV? [Base: *n* = 1,053]

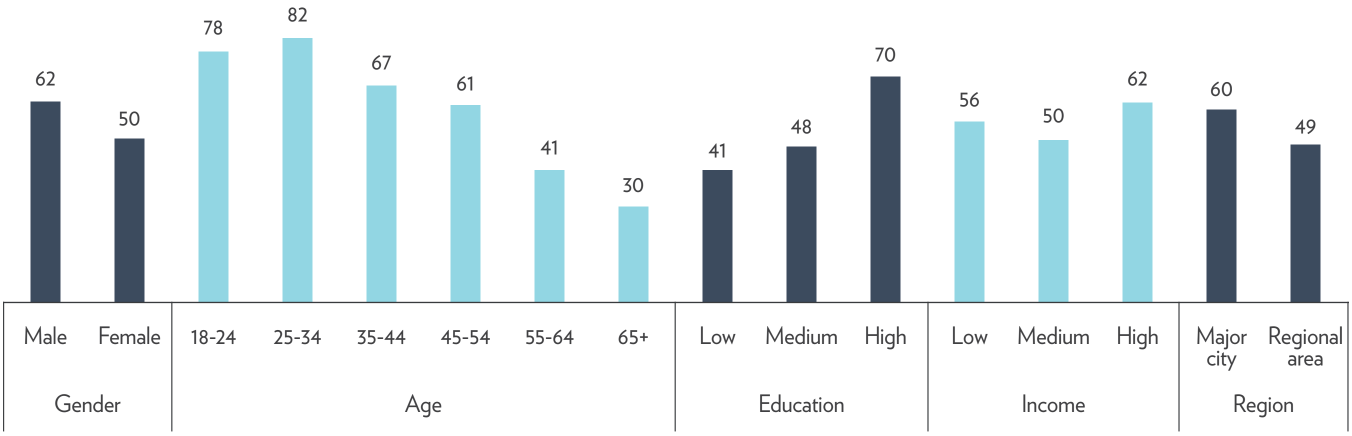
Figure 5.26: Video apps on smart TV used for news by country (% among smart TV users)



[Base: *n* = 24,472]

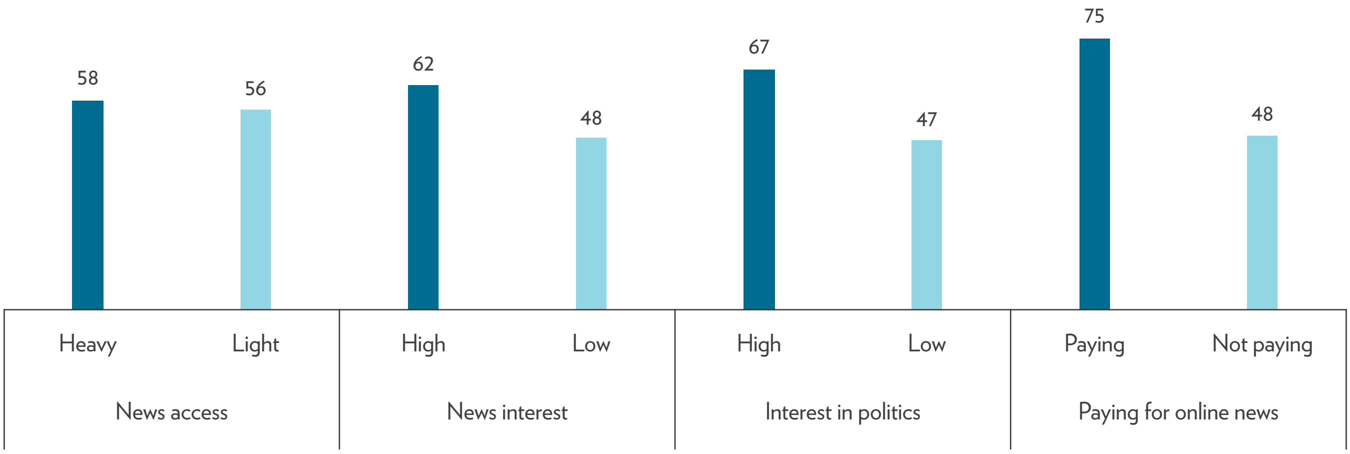
Men, younger people, high income earners, those with high levels of education, and those living in cities are much more likely to report watching news via video apps on their smart TV (see **figure 5.27**).

Figure 5.27: Video apps on smart TV used for news by demographics (% among smart TV users)



Use of video apps on smart TVs for news varies by news access, interest in news and politics, and paying for news. While there is little difference between heavy and light news consumers, those with higher levels of interest in news and politics are more likely to watch news via video apps. This gap is more pronounced when comparing paying news users (75%) with non-payers (48%) (see **figure 5.28**)

Figure 5.28: Video apps on smart TV used for news by news access, news interest, interest in politics and paying for online news (% among smart TV users)

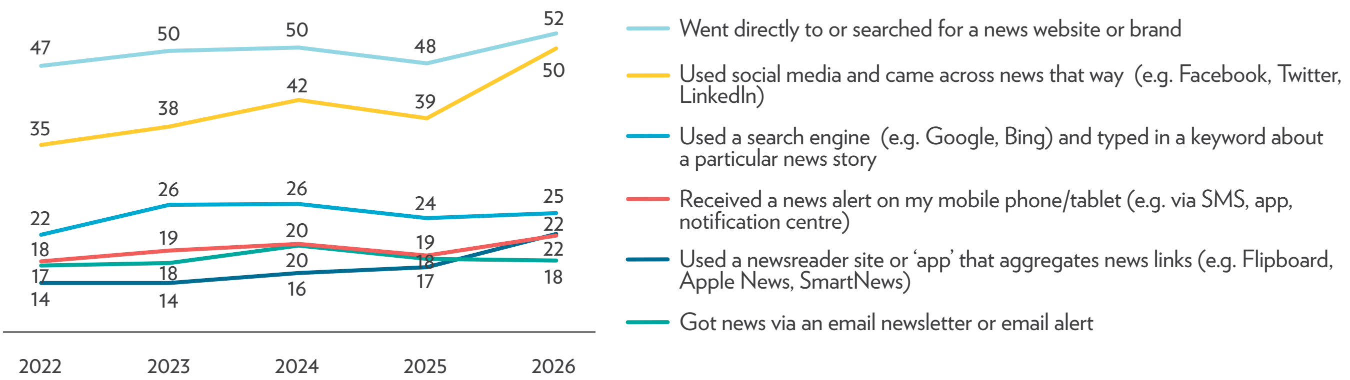


PATHWAYS TO ONLINE NEWS

Direct to brand access dominates, but social media is closing the gap

More than half of respondents (52%) say they go directly to a news website, while half (50%) say they come across news via social media, which is an 11 percentage point increase from 2025. On the other hand, other pathways to news, such as search engines (25%) and email newsletters (18%), remain relatively low and stable (see **figure 5.29**).

Figure 5.29: General pathways to online news 2022 – 2026 (%)

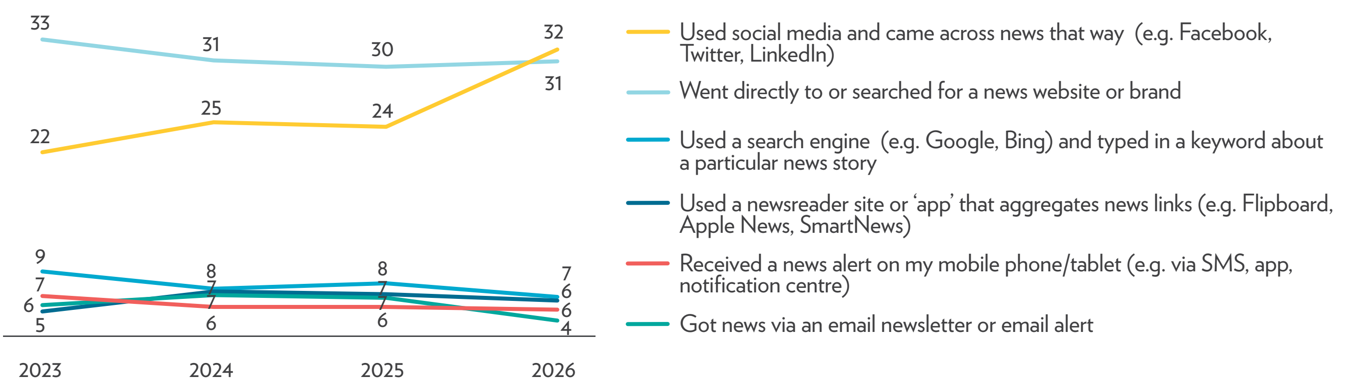


[Q10] Thinking about how you got news online (via computer, mobile or any device) _in the last week_, which were the ways in which you came across news stories? Please select all that apply. [Base: *n* = 2,025]

Social media has surpassed direct to news brands as the main pathway to online news

Nearly one third of respondents (32%) say they mainly come across news via social media, which, for the first time, exceeds the proportion who say they go directly to a news website (31%) as their main pathway of accessing online news (see **figure 5.30**).

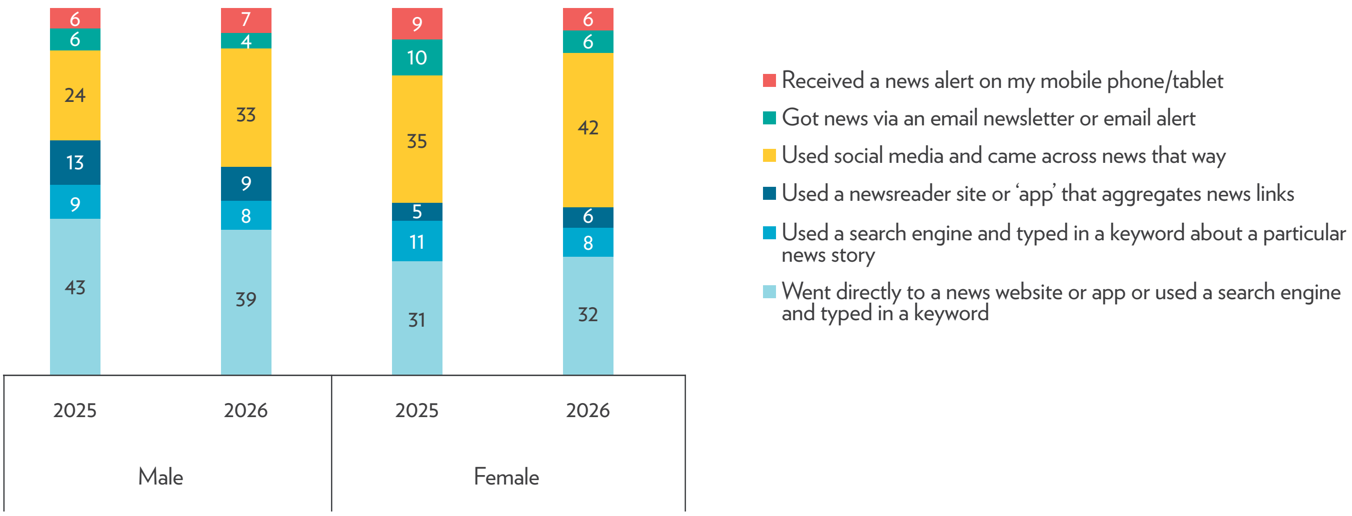
Figure 5.30: Main pathway to online news 2023 – 2026 (%)



[Q10a_new2017] Which of these was the **MAIN** way in which you came across news in the last week? [Base: *n* = 1,745]

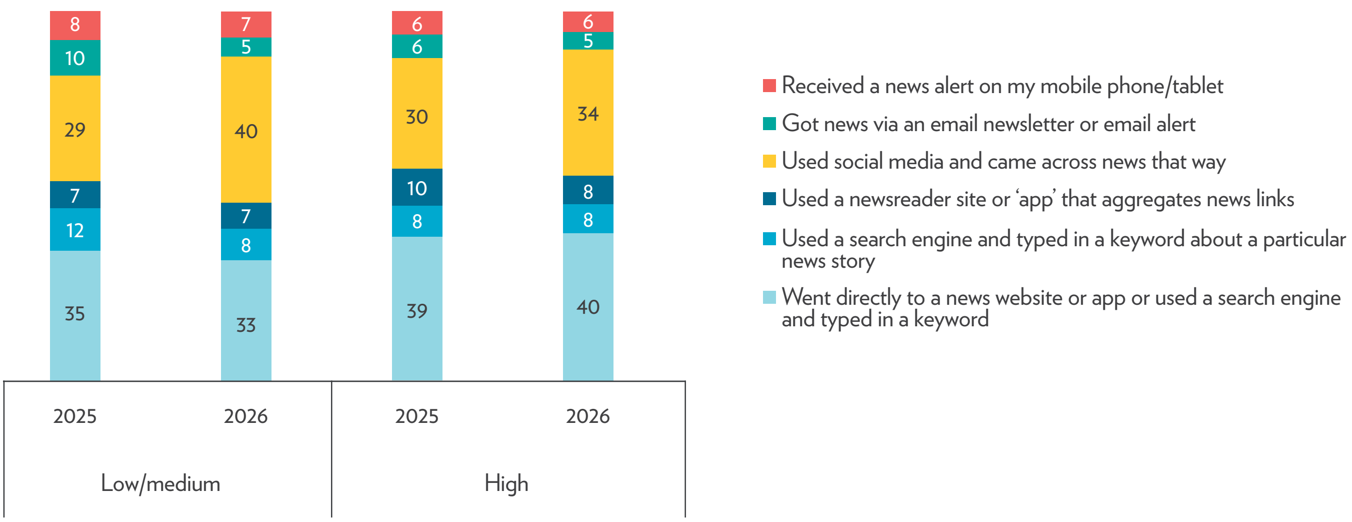
Men are increasingly turning away from news websites (39%, -4) and towards social media (33%, +9) as their main pathway to news. In contrast, women's use of news websites remains relatively stable (32%, +1). Women are also less likely to rely on alerts, with use of news alerts and email alerts both declining (6%, -3 and -4 respectively). At the same time, a higher proportion report coming across news via social media (42%, +7) (see **figure 5.31**).

Figure 5.31: Main pathway to online news by gender 2025 – 2026 (%)



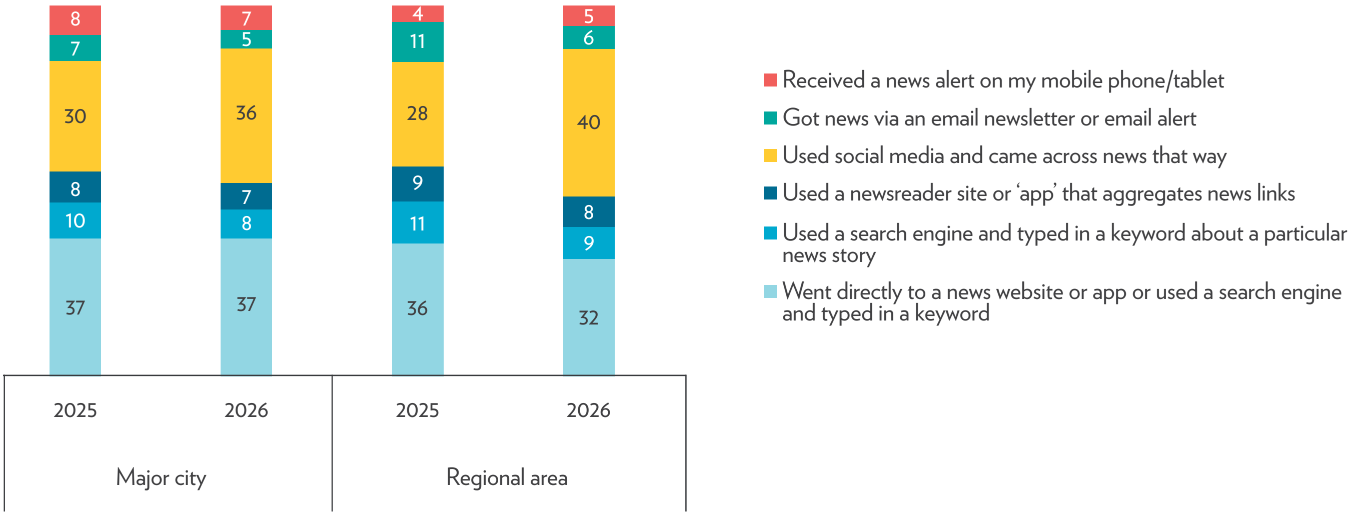
The data show that those with low and medium levels of education are increasingly accessing news via social media (40%, +11), while turning away from other pathways, including going directly to news websites (33%, -2). By contrast, those with high levels of education have relatively stable patterns of news access (see **figure 5.32**).

Figure 5.32: Main pathway to online news by education 2025 – 2026 (%)



There has been a noticeable increase in coming across news on social media among regional residents (40%, +12), while direct access to news websites (32%, -4) and use of email newsletters (6%, -5) have declined (see **figure 5.33**).

Figure 5.33: Main pathway to news by region 2025 – 2026 (%)



SUMMARY

The proportion of Australians accessing news more than once a day has increased this year. This rise is particularly prominent among younger audiences, with a significant increase among those aged 18-24 over the past four years.

Australians' news consumption continues to evolve across platforms, pathways and devices. While traditional sources such as TV remain important, digital pathways are becoming increasingly prominent. Social media is now the second most widely used source of news, ahead of online news, while podcasts and AI chatbots continue to grow.

This year we saw an increase in the proportion of people who say they access seven or more news brands. This was particularly the case among under 35s, suggesting that young news consumers may be becoming more varied in the brands they pay attention to online.

Video apps are widely used on smart TVs for news with people accessing news via platforms such as YouTube, slightly above the global average. Use is higher among younger, more educated and high income earners.

Finally, pathways to news are shifting. While direct access remains important, social media now surpasses it as the main pathway to news. This shift towards more platform-driven access is particularly evident among men, lower-educated groups and regional audiences.

COMMENTARY

AUSTRALIANS ARE FUELLING A NEWS BOOM AND THE TECH PLATFORMS ARE CASHING IN

Tim Love, Head of Digital, Sky News Australia

This year's *Digital News Report: Australia* subverts a prolific, yet flawed, tech titan narrative that news content forms an undesired and inconsequential presence on social media. To the contrary, Australian engagement with news has never been higher as audiences encounter professionally-produced news and analysis in a tech environment inundated with inexpensive artificially generated content.

Heavy news consumption has risen to 56%, up three points in just one year. For younger Australians (aged 18 to 24), consumption has jumped 11 points to reach 49%. Global conflicts and economic shocks are no longer considered abstract stories to these Australians. People have never before been so engaged with complex geopolitical issues which impact their household budgets. And as the events that drive the news cycle make more of an impact on the everyday cost of living, audiences are diversifying the brands they rely on.

People are discovering new brands, new personalities and new platforms that are educating, informing and entertaining them every day.

Australians now have unprecedented choice and diversity in the media voices they can follow. More than one-third of consumers now access seven or more news brands in a single week. Trusted names in the industry continue to command attention, but the shift in the way people reach these stories is accelerating.

Despite growth in direct access to all of the top five highest-reaching online news brands – News.com.au, ABC, 9News, The Guardian and SkyNews.com.au – access to news content via social media grew even faster, and for the first time social media has overtaken direct access to news websites as the primary pathway to online news.

While traditional TV remains the most used single source at 57%, social media is now a breathing-down-the-neck second at 56%. Among the 25-34 demographic, a staggering 77% use social media for news. The shift in pathways is where the danger lies for the viability of Australia's news media sector.

This is not a new threat, but it's one that is evolving quickly, with the 2026 data showing that nearly half of those who primarily use social media for news are now heavy users, a significant rise from 2023.

The stakes could not be higher. The Albanese government's proposed News Bargaining Incentive is a necessary corrective, and it is especially critical for strengthening the communities of regional Australia. This year's *Digital News Report: Australia* shows a 12-point increase in regional residents coming across news via social media, while direct access to news websites by people in these areas has declined. The challenge has progressed with the emergence of AI. AI chatbot use for news has grown to 9% of people overall and double that (18%) among those aged 25-34. Rather than reporting the news, these bots are stealing Australian journalism, reformatting it, and pumping it out to a rapidly growing cohort of consumers.

We risk a future where the primary source of truth is a synthetic summary that will erode the fourth estate's effectiveness unless a framework is established to get these tech titans to the negotiating table and to pay for the content they use in their models and to keep their users hooked on their algorithms.

Journalism is the lifeblood of a healthy democracy, providing the value that sustains our public discourse. The 2026 *Digital News Report: Australia* proves that Australians value this work more than ever; they are consuming it in record numbers, and across more platforms and brands, than any time in history.

This data reflects a nation of highly engaged news consumers who care what is happening in the world around them.

Heavy news consumption is reaching new highs, and interest from a new generation of Australians is surging.

While the shift toward social media as a primary pathway and the emergence of AI represent significant structural changes for Australia's media industry, these factors also demonstrate the indispensable nature of the content produced by Australia's vibrant landscape of newsrooms sharing diverse viewpoints around the country.

6 SOCIAL MEDIA, NEWS VIDEO AND PODCASTING

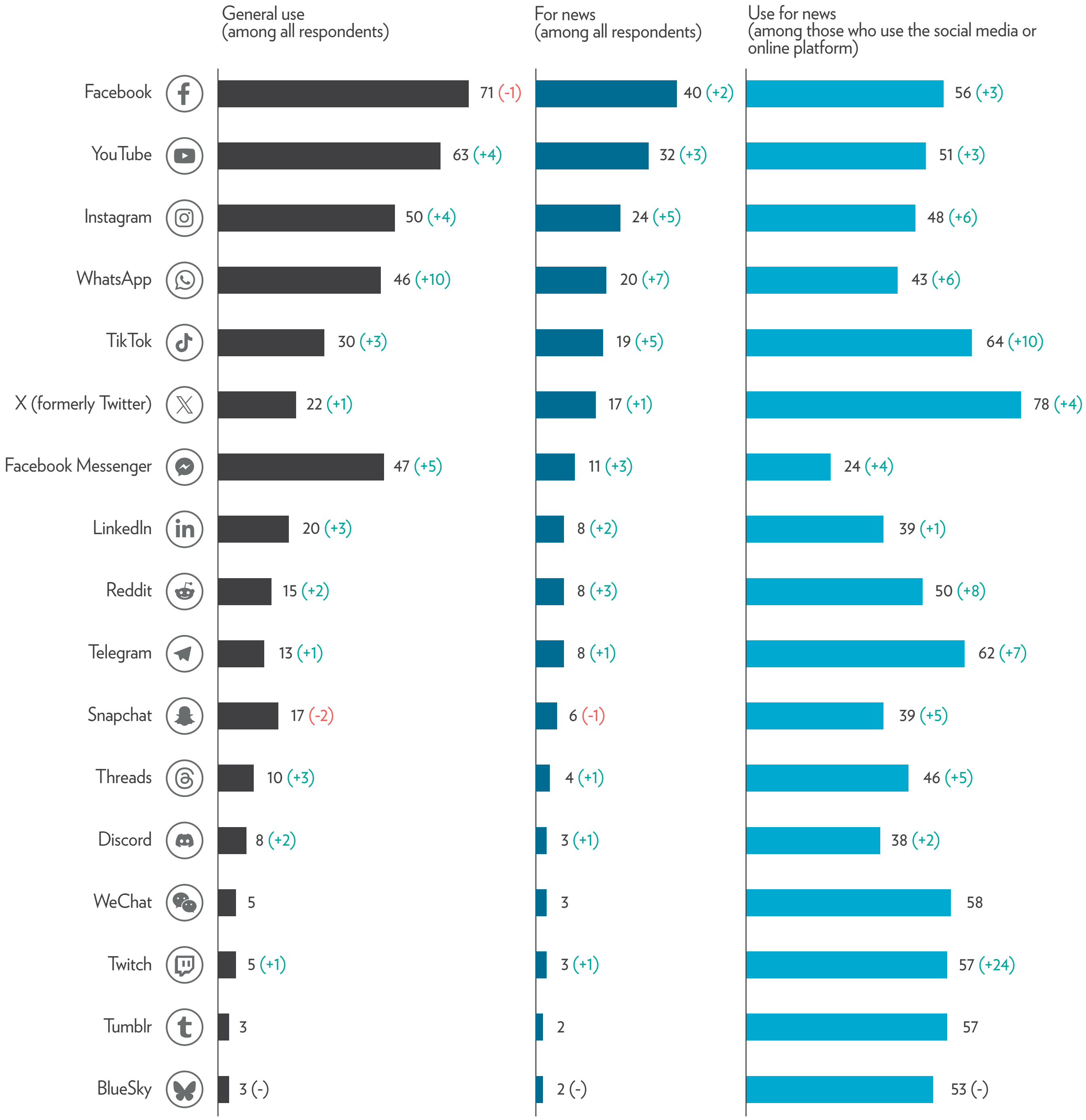
- Almost half (48%, +12) of 18-24s use TikTok for news.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%, +6) watch news videos online each week.
- Podcast use is rising across the political spectrum, with increases among right-leaning (16%, +7) and left-leaning audiences (18%, +4).
- Interaction with news is growing with 40% talking about it with others and 39% reading comments on social media.
- Men and younger people are increasingly sharing news on social media.

SOCIAL MEDIA NEWS USE

WhatsApp, TikTok and Instagram are increasingly used for news

News audiences on social media are centralised around a handful of growing brands. Facebook (40%) is still the most used social platform for news, followed by YouTube (32%) and Instagram (24%). One in five say they use WhatsApp to get news, and this has increased by seven percentage points since 2025. TikTok (19%) is also rapidly growing as a news source, seeing a five percentage point increase in a year (see **figure 6.1**).

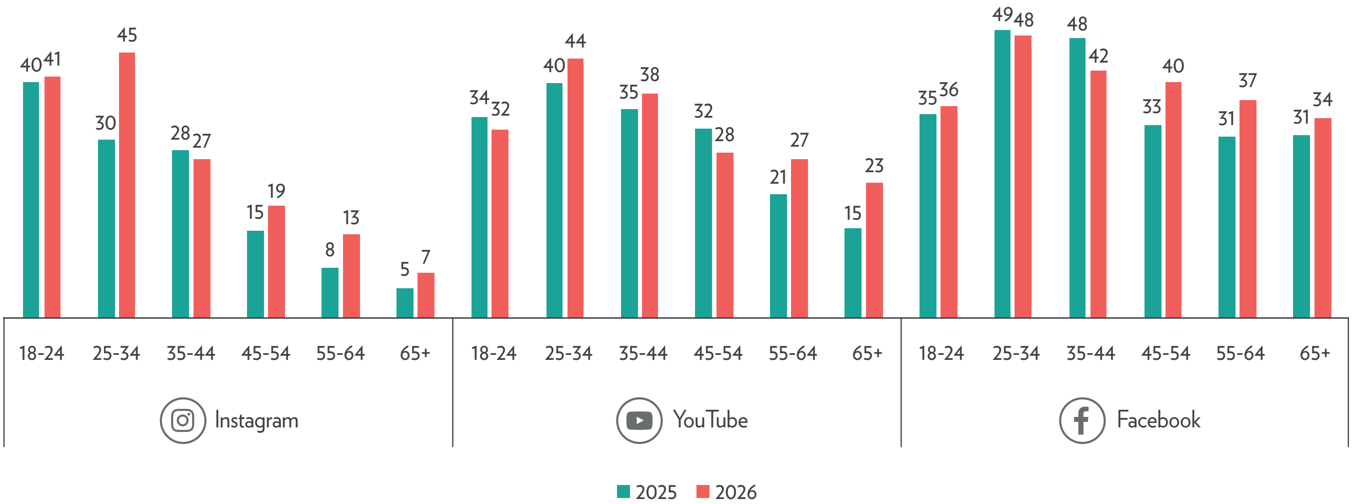
Figure 6.1: Social media platforms used generally vs for news (%, change since 2025)



[Q12A] Which, if any, of the following have you used for any purpose in the last week? Please select all that apply. [Q12B] Which, if any, of the following have you used for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week? Please select all that apply. [Base: 2025 = 2,025; 2026 = 1,048] A dash next to a percentage in the list means no change between 2025 and 2026. WeChat and Tumblr have no data from 2025 for comparison.

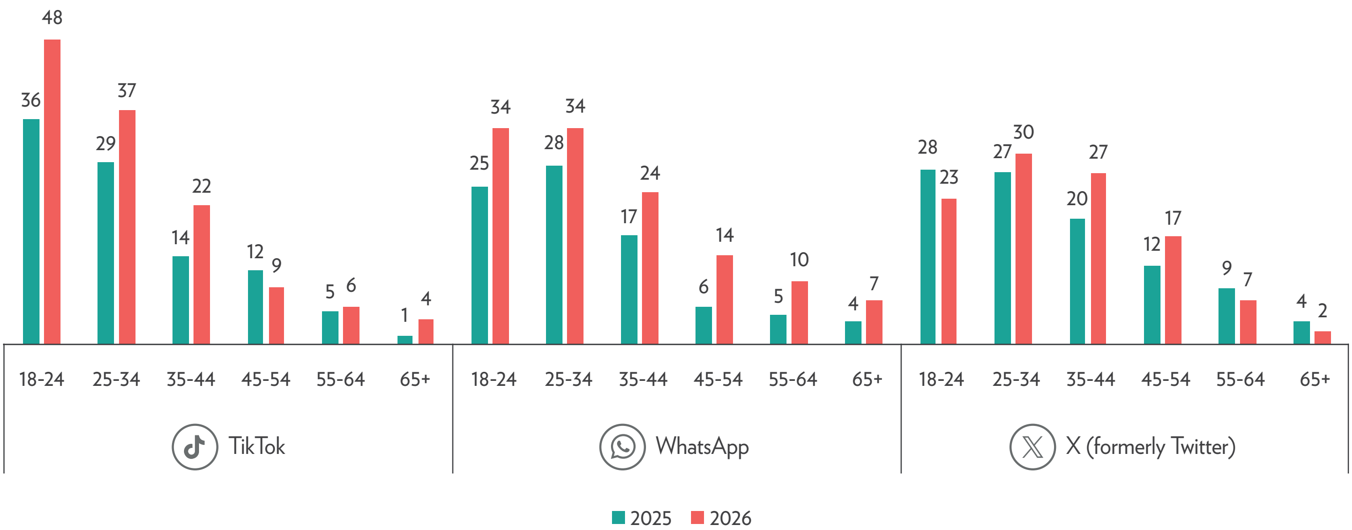
Growth in news audiences on social media is often assumed to be most common with younger people. This is certainly the case with TikTok which has seen an increase this year in news consumption among 18-24-year-olds (48%, +12) (see **figure 6.3**). This means almost half of 18-24-year-olds are using TikTok to get news. TikTok, WhatsApp and Instagram have also seen growth among 25-34-year-olds. By contrast, Facebook's audience growth this year is mostly among 45-54-year-olds (40%, +7) and 55-64-year-olds (37%, +6), and, to a lesser extent, Instagram (45-54s: +4; 55-64s: +5) (see **figure 6.2**). YouTube and Facebook are popular among 35+, while young people are high in news use across all platforms.

Figure 6.2: Instagram, YouTube and Facebook for news by age 2025 – 2026 (%)



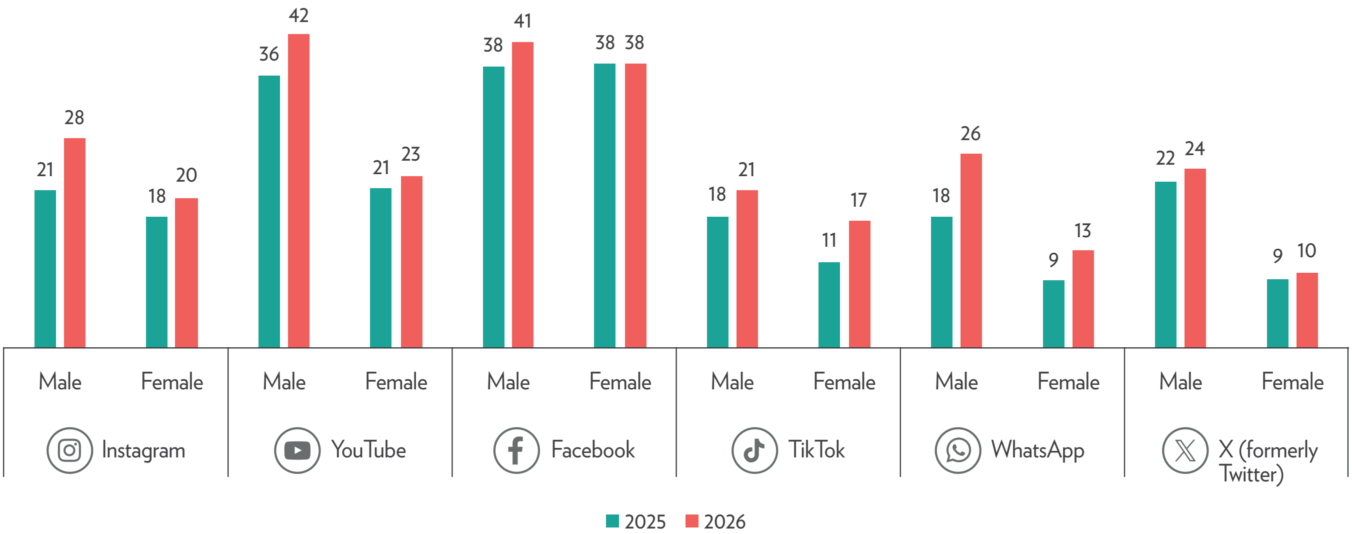
[Q12B] Which, if any, of the following have you used for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week? Please select all that apply. [Base: 2025 = 2,025; 2026 = 1,048]

Figure 6.3: TikTok, WhatsApp and X (formerly Twitter) for news by age 2025 – 2026 (%)



Men are generally heavier news consumers than women. This holds true on social media for most platforms, with men (28%) being more likely than women (20%) to say they are accessing news on Instagram. Men are also much higher in news use on YouTube (42%). Facebook has a narrower gap between men and women news consumers, with men being only 3 percentage points higher than women (see **figure 6.4**)

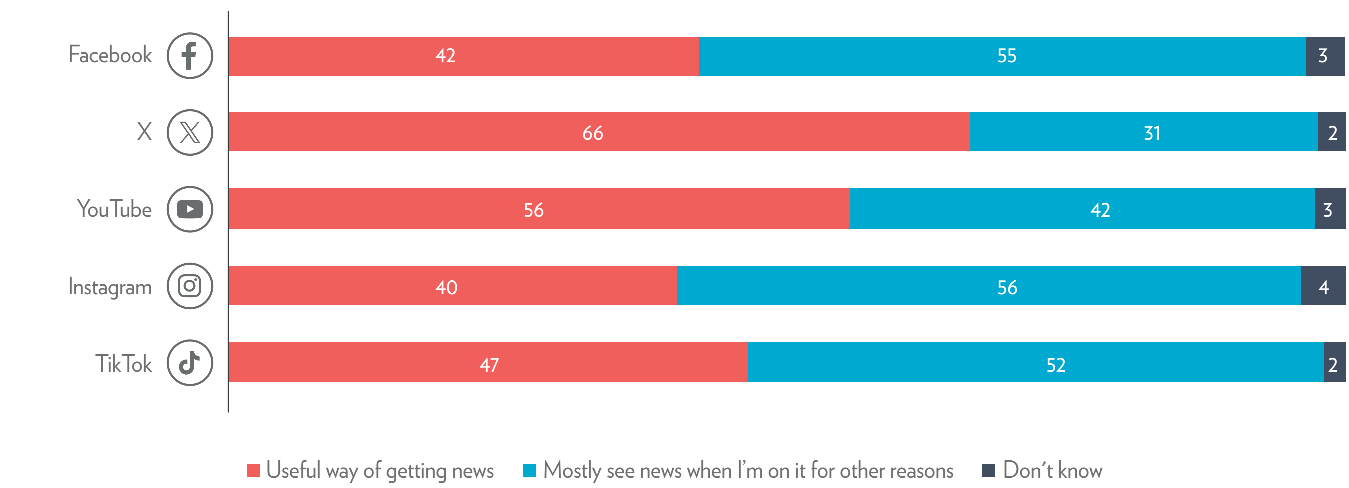
Figure 6.4: Social media platforms for news by gender 2025 – 2026 (%)



Facebook and Instagram users have the highest incidental news exposure

This year we asked respondents who use social media platforms for news about their intentions when accessing news on those platforms. Among those who use Facebook for news, 42% say they think it's a useful way of getting news and 55% say they mostly see news while they are on Facebook for other reasons. A similar proportion of Instagram news users report getting news incidentally (56%). X users (66%) and YouTube users (56%) have a higher proportion saying they are useful ways to get news compared to those who see news on those platforms incidentally (31%; 42%). This suggests YouTube and X users may be more likely to be active news seekers (see **figure 6.5**).

Figure 6.5: Incidental vs. active news consumption on social media platforms (%)

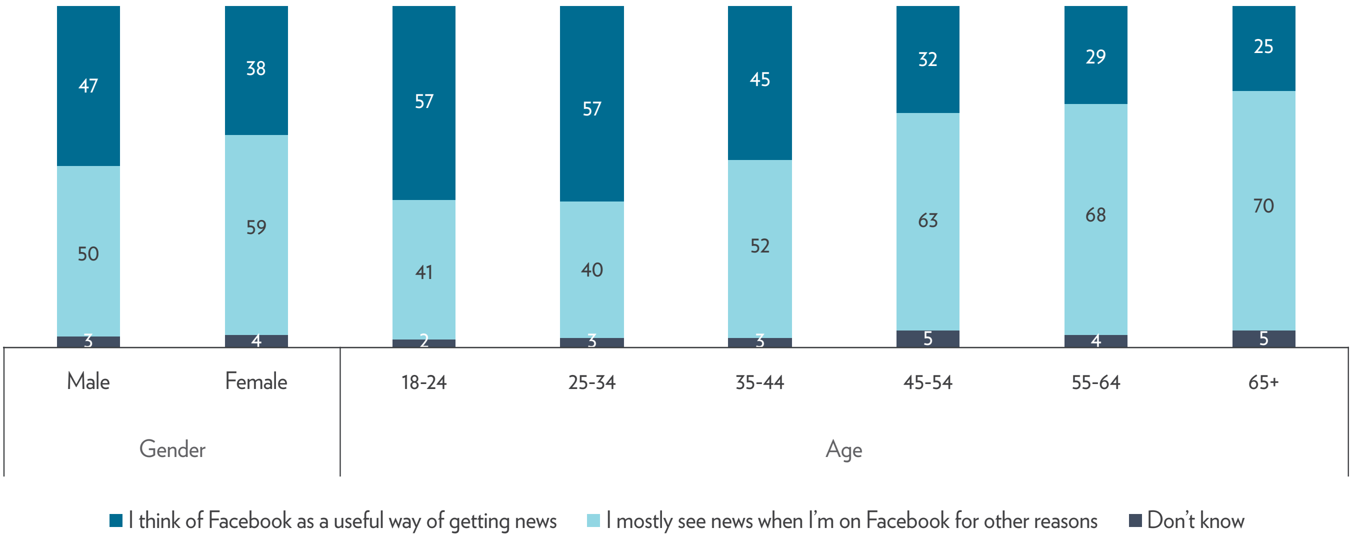


[Q12cii_...] You say you use [...] for news. Which of the following statements applies best to you? [Base: Facebook *n* = 923; X *n* = 348; YouTube *n* = 633; Instagram *n* = 450; TikTok *n* = 311]

Women are more incidental news consumers than men

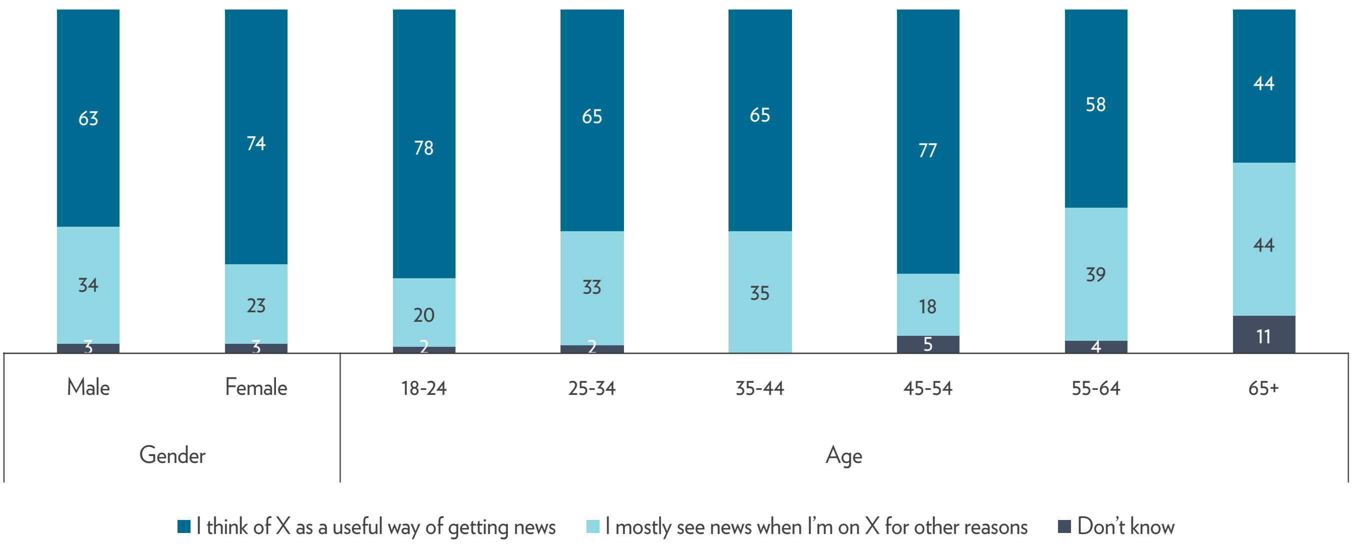
Women (59%) are more likely than men (50%) to say they come across news on Facebook while they are on it for other things. Younger people aged 18-24 (57%), 25-34 (57%) and 35-44 (45%) are more likely to actively seek news on Facebook, and older people encounter news incidentally (45-54, 63%; 55-64, 68%; 65+, 70%). This suggests that while growth in Facebook news use is continuing among older generations, it is younger respondents who may be more active news seekers while there (see **figure 6.6**).

Figure 6.6: Incidental vs. active news consumption on Facebook by gender and age (%)



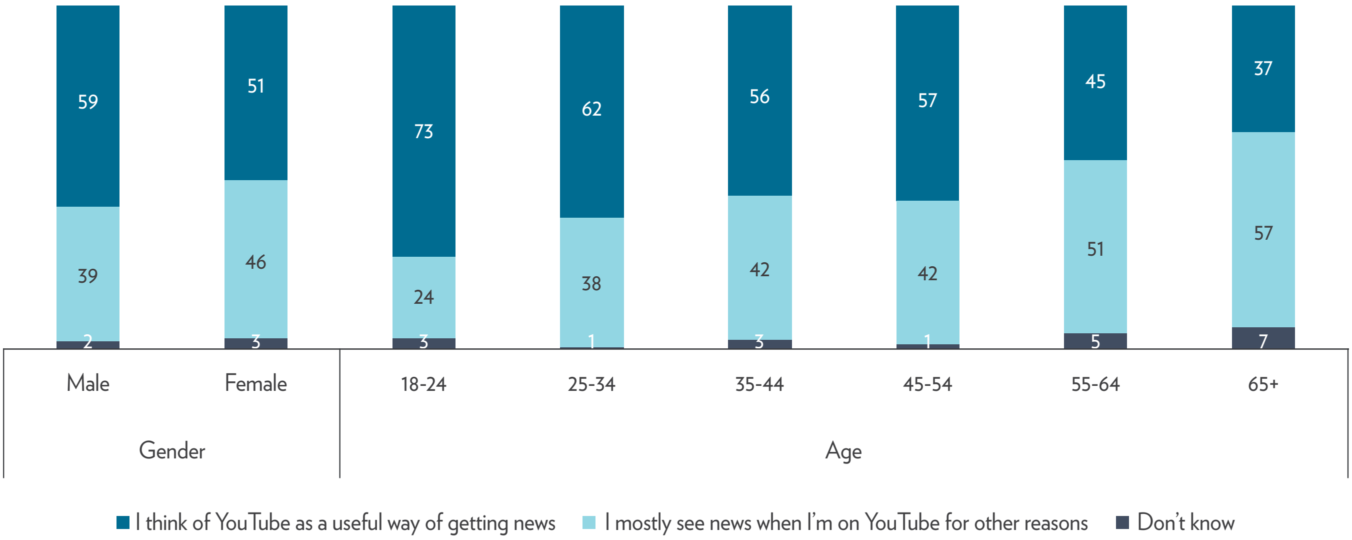
Generally, X users tend to seek news on the platform, with 18-24-year-olds being the most likely (78%). Women (74%) are more likely than men (63%) to say they see it as a useful way to get news (see **figure 6.7**).

Figure 6.7: Incidental vs. active news consumption on X (formerly Twitter) by gender and age (%)



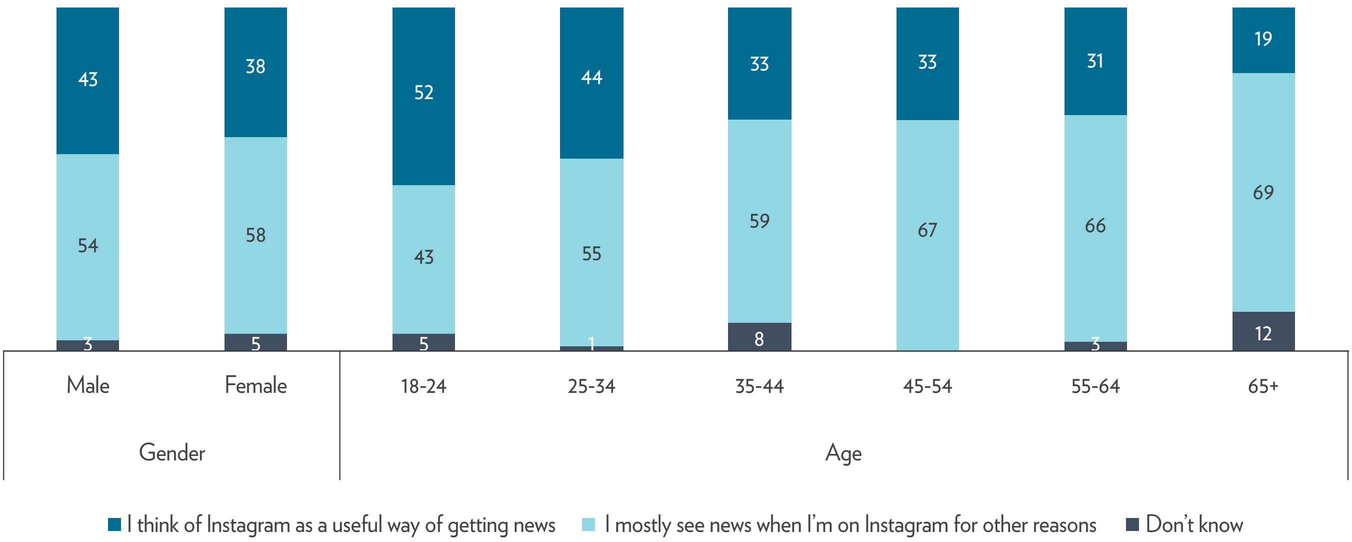
For younger cohorts, YouTube is perceived as a useful way to get news (18-24, 73%; 25-43, 62%), compared to older generations who mostly see news when on YouTube for other reasons (55-64, 51%; 65+, 57%) (see **figure 6.8**).

Figure 6.8: Incidental vs. active news consumption on YouTube by gender and age (%)



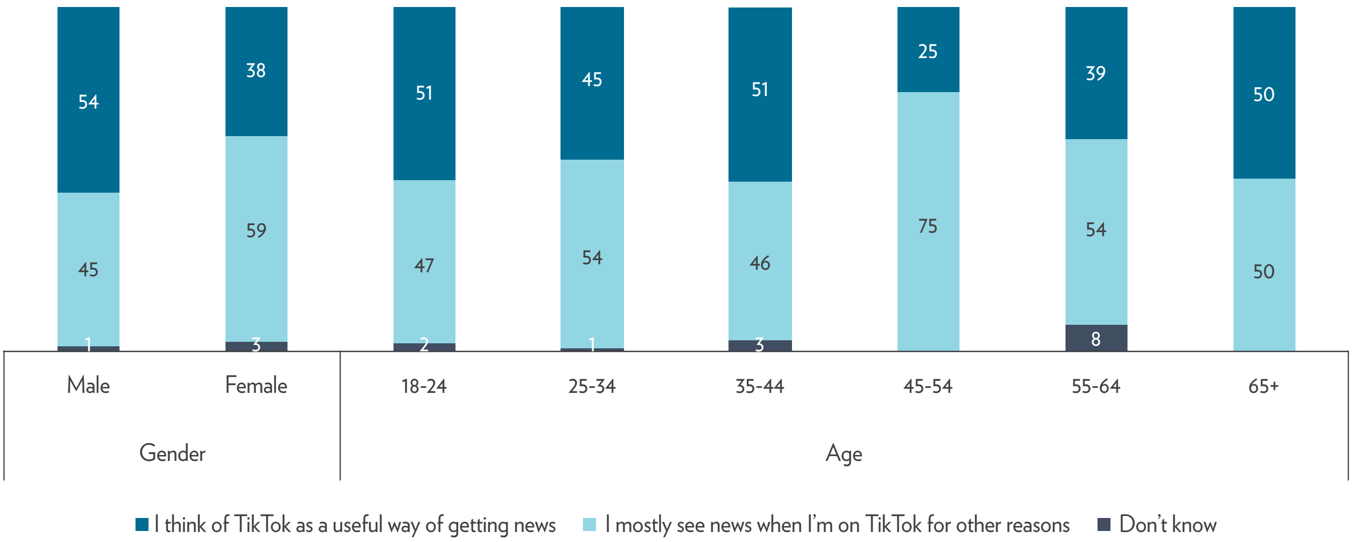
Similar to YouTube, younger people are more likely to be using Instagram for news, but the proportion of these young people who are actively seeking news on the platform is lower (18-24s: 52%, 25-34s, 44%) (see **figure 6.9**).

Figure 6.9: Incidental vs. active news consumption on Instagram by gender and age (%)



For younger cohorts, TikTok is a useful place to find news as well as where they bump into news. About half (47%) of those aged 18-24 mostly see news on TikTok when they are on it for other reasons and a similar proportion (51%) seek news on TikTok. Women (59%) are more likely to be exposed to news incidentally compared to men (45%) while they are on TikTok (see **figure 6.10**).

Figure 6.10: Incidental vs. active news consumption on TikTok by gender and age (%)



Social media news users are more likely to actively seek news on social media platforms

Those whose main source of news is social media are much more likely to say Facebook is a useful way to get news (48%) compared to those whose main source is TV (40%) or online news (37%) (see **figure 6.11**).

This trend is similar across other social media platforms where more X users (76%) access news actively compared to TV (62%) or online (60%) news users (see **figure 6.12**).

Figure 6.11: Incidental vs. active news consumption on Facebook by main source (%)

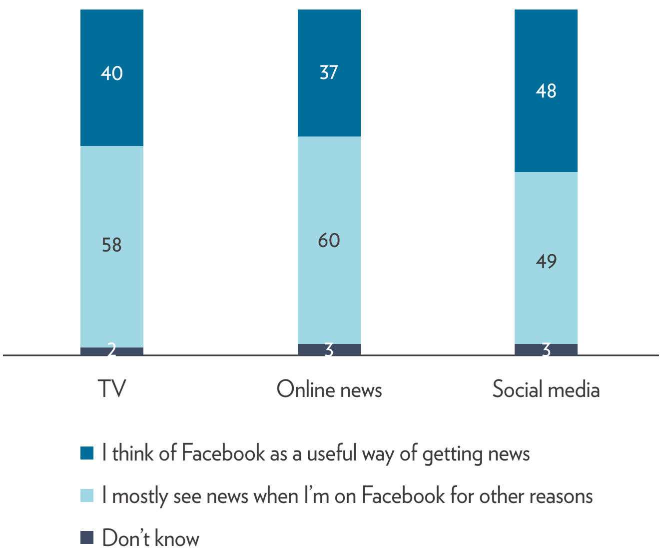
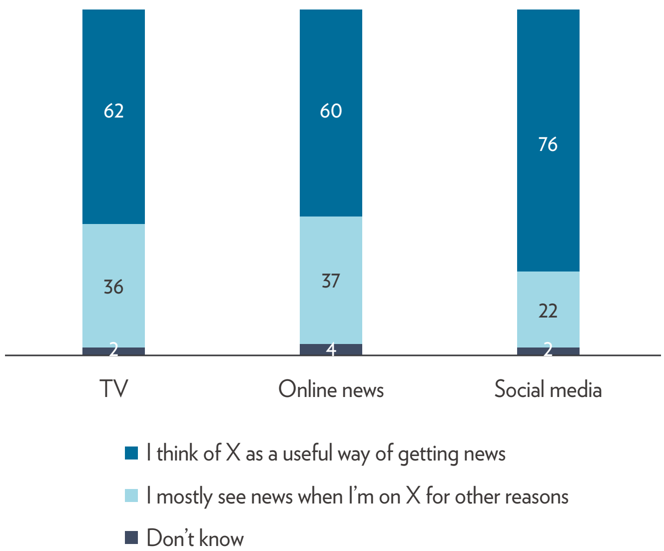


Figure 6.12: Incidental vs. active news consumption on X by main source (%)



Among YouTube news users, 58% of those whose main source is social media say it's a useful way to get news compared to 53% of TV and online news users (see **figure 6.13**).

While active news seeking on Instagram is not as high as X or YouTube, those who say their main source of news is social media have a higher proportion (43%) of users saying they think it is a useful way to get news than TV (39%) or online (35%) news users (see **figure 6.14**).

Similar to Instagram, those who rely mainly on social media for their news are more likely to actively seek news while on TikTok (50%) than TV (39%) or online news users (40%) (see **figure 6.15**).

Figure 6.13: Incidental vs. active news consumption on YouTube by main source (%)

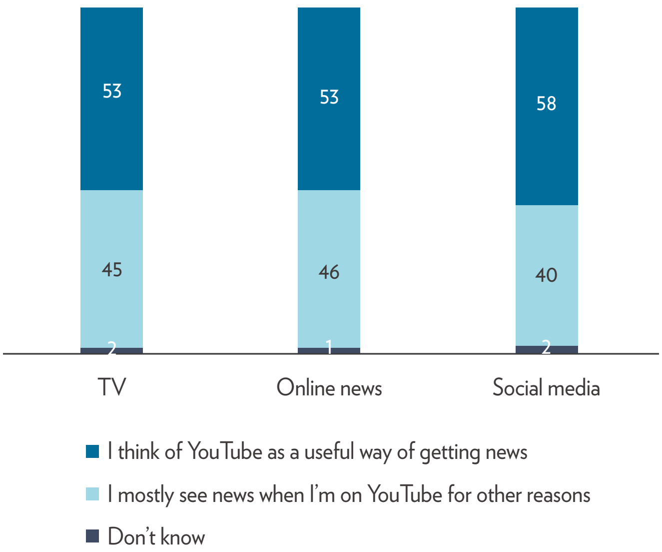


Figure 6.14: Incidental vs. active news consumption on Instagram by main source (%)

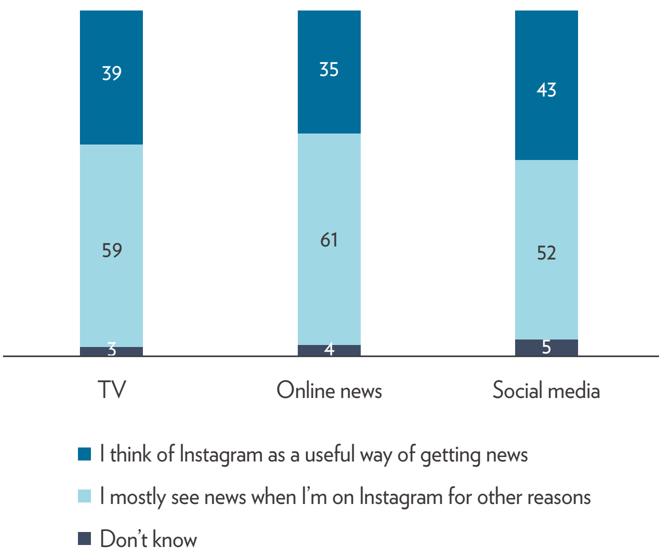
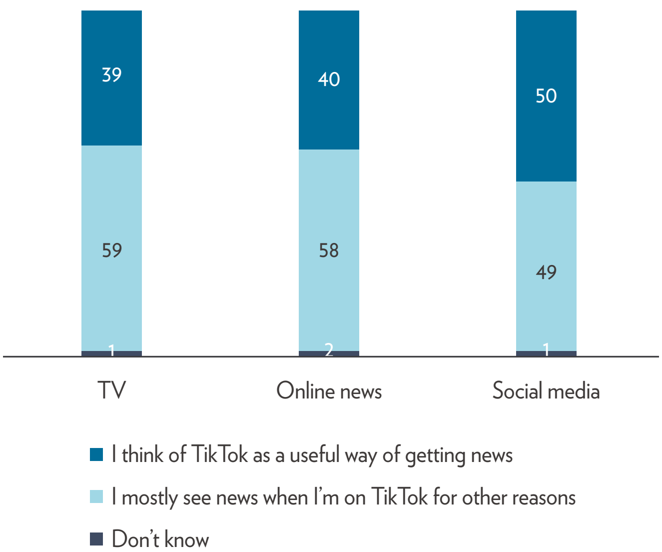


Figure 6.15: Incidental vs. active news consumption on TikTok by main source (%)

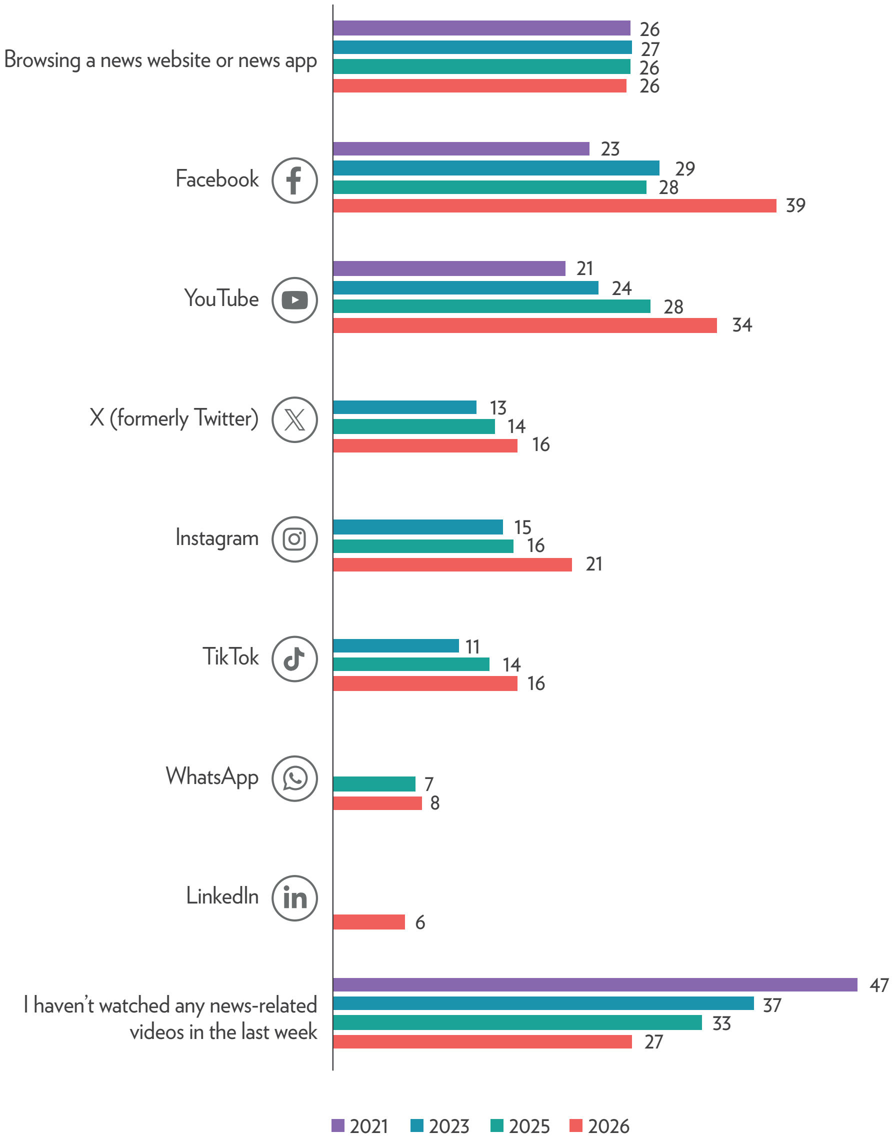


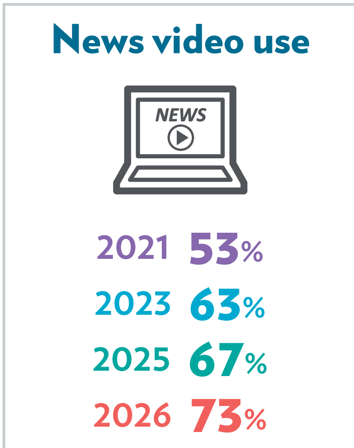
ONLINE NEWS VIDEOS

News video viewing rises on social platforms

More Australians are watching news videos on social media. **Figure 6.16** shows that almost three-quarters (73%) report having watched news related video in the past week, this a 20 percentage point increase since 2021.[1] Facebook remains the most widely used platform for news videos (39%) followed by YouTube (34%) and Instagram (21%). Use of X and TikTok continues to grow, each reaching 16% this year. By contrast, watching news video via news websites or news apps has remained stable at 26% over the last five years.

Figure 6.16: News-related video consumption 2021 – 2026 (%)





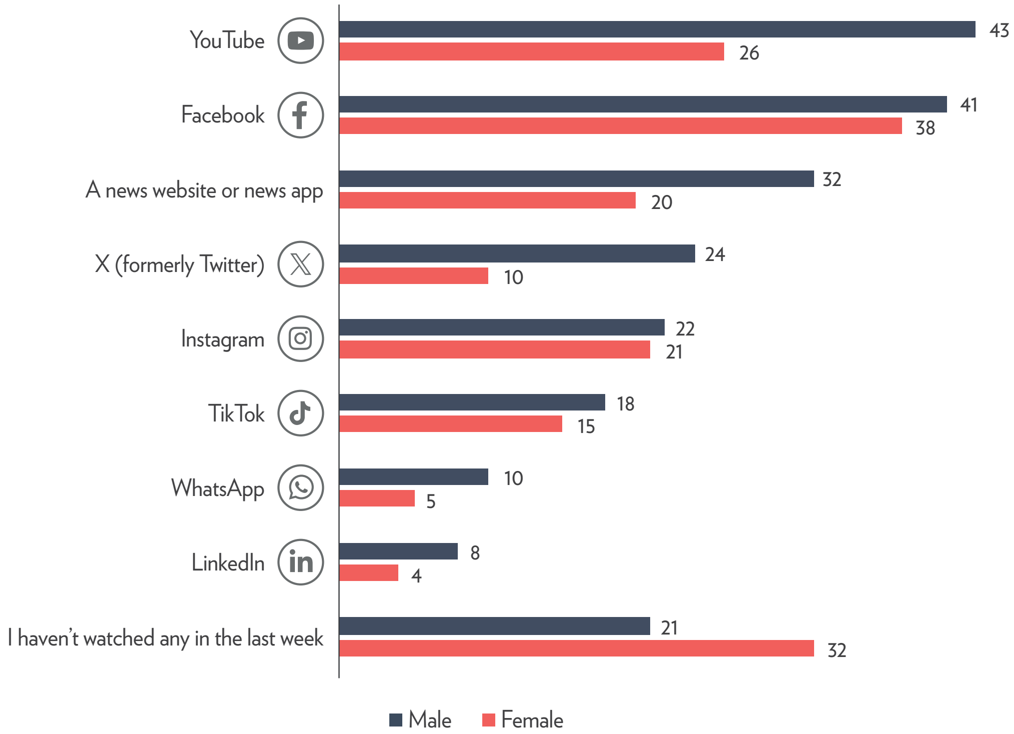
[Q11_VIDEO_2018a] Thinking about when you used online news-related video (a short clip, a live stream, or a full episode) over the last week, which of the following did you do? Please select all that apply. [Base: *n* = 2,025]

[1] Online news video use percentages are generated by subtracting the numbers in the 'I haven't watched any news-related videos in the last week' category from 100.

More men (79%) say they have watched a news-related video in the past week, compared to 68% of women. YouTube is the most popular platform for news videos among men (43%), while Facebook is the leading platform among women (38%).

Men are also much more likely to watch news videos via news websites or apps (32%) than women (20%). However, the gender gap is smaller for platforms such as Instagram and TikTok (see **figure 6.17**).

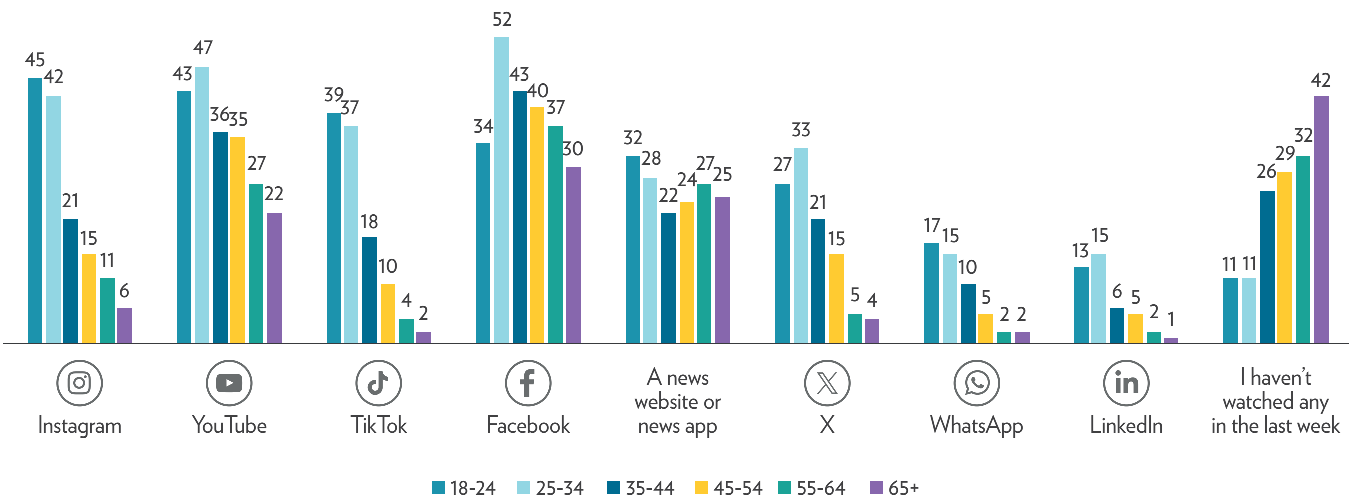
Figure 6.17: News-related video consumption by gender (%)



Younger people are much more likely to consume news videos, with 89% of those aged under 35 reporting having watched a news-related video in the past week, compared with only 58% of those aged 65 and over.

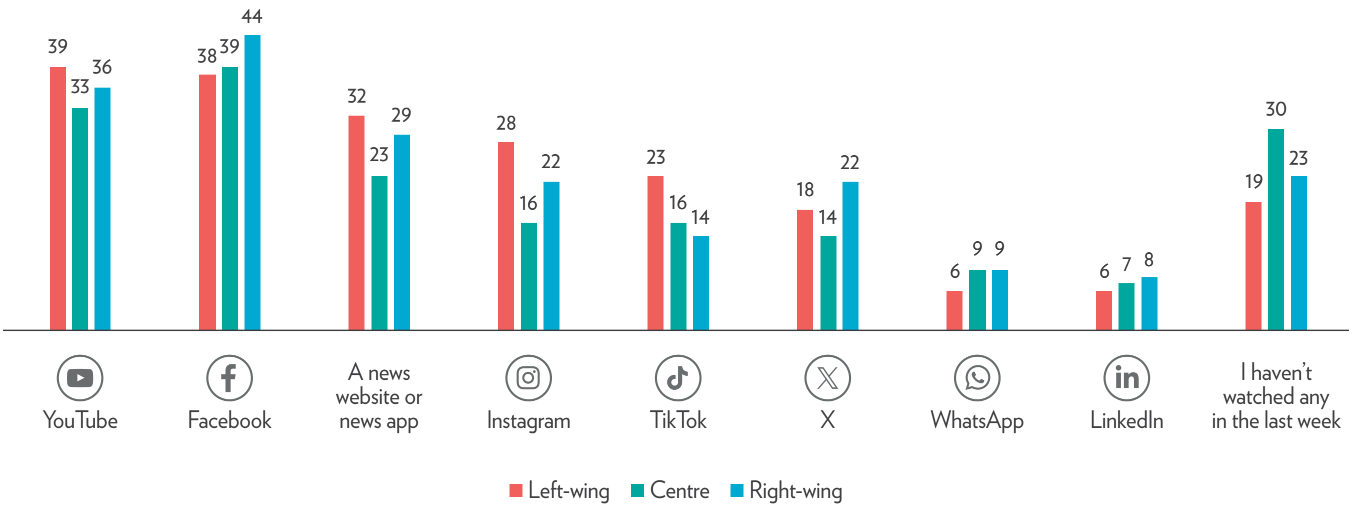
Platform use varies by age. Instagram is the most popular platform among those aged 18-24, while Facebook is more widely used among older age groups. YouTube is most popular among those aged 25-34 (47%). Notably, the youngest group is also the most likely to watch news videos via news websites or apps (32%) (see **figure 6.18**).

Figure 6.18: News-related video consumption by age (%)



Respondents who identify politically as left- or right-wing show higher levels of news video consumption compared to centre, although platform preferences vary. Facebook is the most widely used platform among right-leaning news consumers (44%), while YouTube is most popular among those on the left (39%). Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are also more widely used among left-leaning respondents than among those in the centre or on the right (see **figure 6.19**).

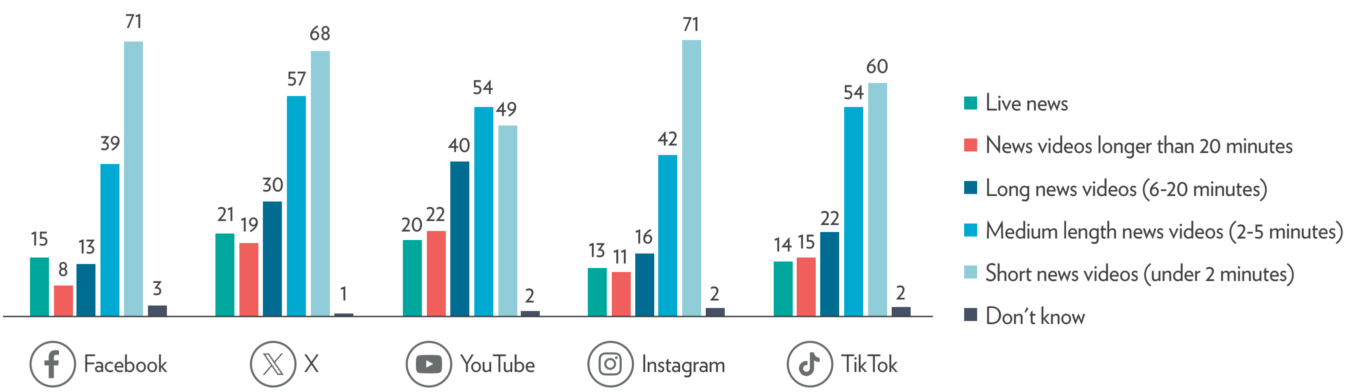
Figure 6.19: News-related video consumption by political orientation (%)



Short form videos dominate, while YouTube supports longer content

We asked respondents who had watched news videos in the past week about the duration of the videos they watched. The data shows that viewing duration varies by platform. Overall, news viewers tend to favour shorter videos, with most watching videos of less than two minutes regardless of platform. This pattern is particularly the case on Facebook and Instagram, where almost three-quarters (71%) watch short-form news videos that are under two minutes. YouTube users are more likely to watch longer content, with over one in five (22%) viewing videos of more than 20 minutes – a higher proportion than on other platforms. News video viewers are more likely to watch live news on X (21%) and YouTube (20%) than on other platforms (see **figure 6.20**).

Figure 6.20: Length of news videos watched (%)

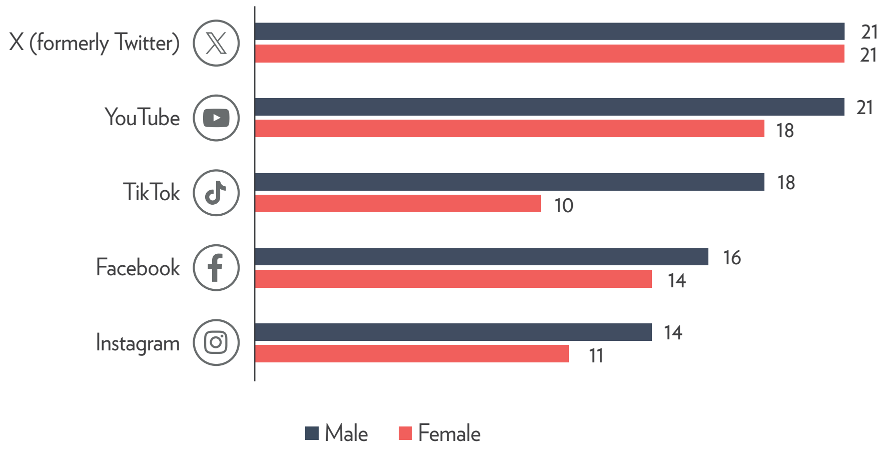


[Q11_video_2026_Platform] You say you access news videos on [Platform name]... Which of the following have you accessed in the last week? Please select all that apply. [Base: Facebook *n* = 568; X (formerly Twitter) *n* = 302; YouTube *n* = 522; Instagram *n* = 368; TikTok *n* = 299]

Men and younger audiences watch live news on social media

Live news use on YouTube (21%), TikTok (18%), Facebook (16%) and Instagram (14%) is higher for men than for women. The exception is X (formerly Twitter) where men and women are equal in their use of live streamed news (21%) (see **figure 6.21**).

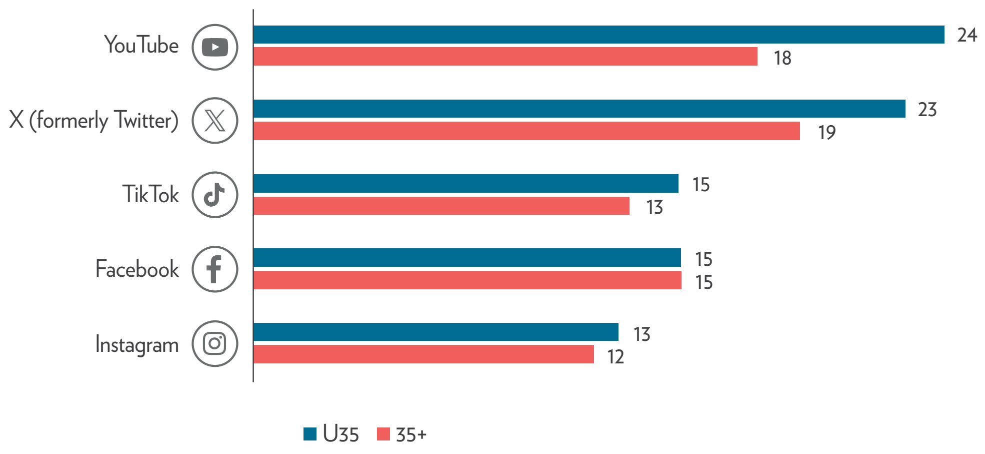
Figure 6.21: Live news use on social media by gender (%)



In general, younger respondents are more likely to be accessing live news on social platforms. YouTube (24%) is the most popular platform for under 35s, followed by X (formerly Twitter) (23%), TikTok (15%) and Facebook (15%).

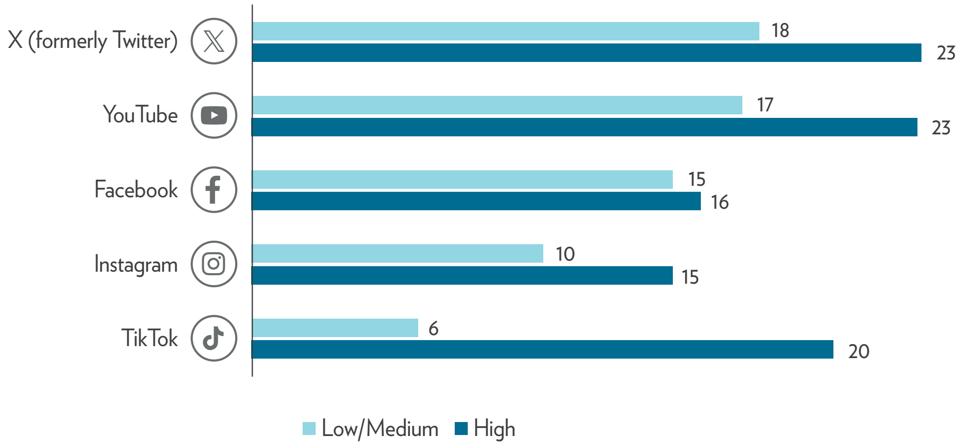
Although popular among young people, live news use is still quite high among over 35s on YouTube (18%) and X (formerly Twitter) (19%) (see **figure 6.22**).

Figure 6.22: Live news use on social media by age (%)



Live news use appears to be linked to higher levels of education. Those with high levels of education (23%) are much more likely than low education groups to use live news on X (formerly Twitter) (18%) and YouTube (17%) (see **figure 6.23**).

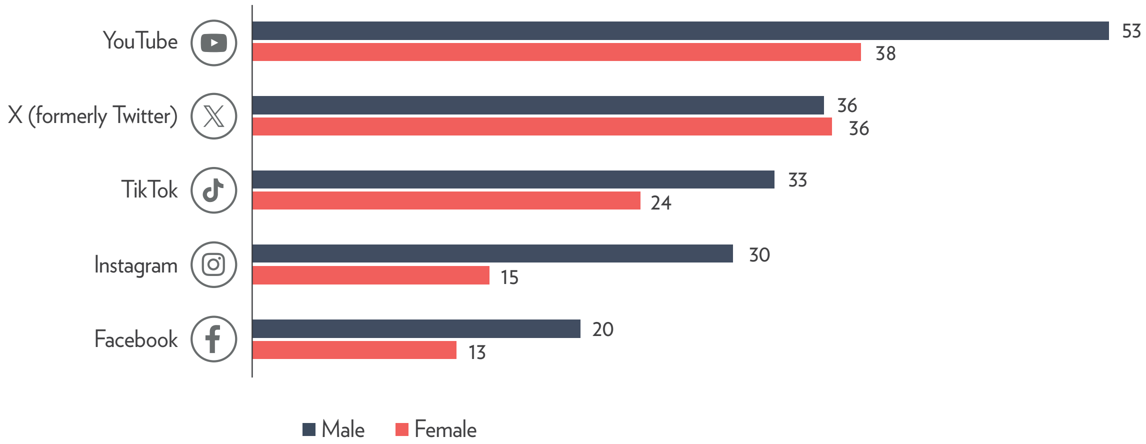
Figure 6.23: Live news use on social media by education (%)



More than half of male YouTube video users watch long news videos

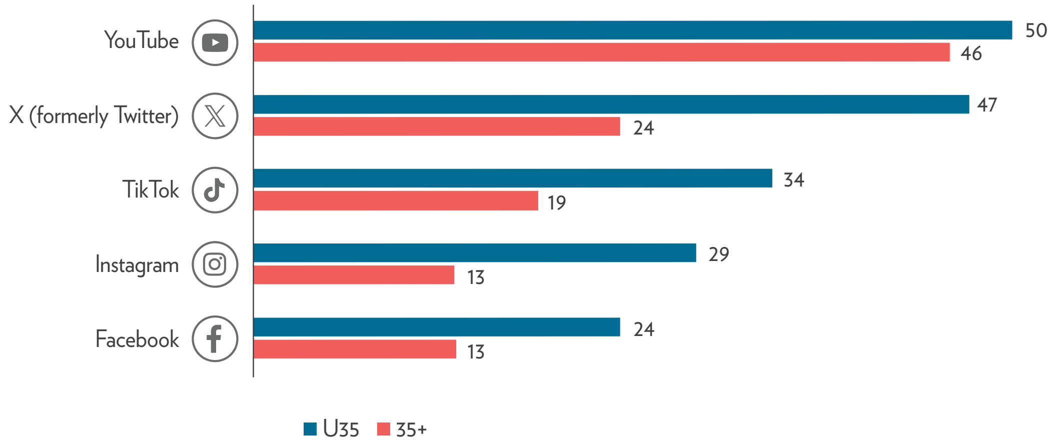
YouTube users tend to watch longer form videos of up to 20 minutes. This is especially the case for men (53%) than for women (38%). Men are also more likely to watch long video news on Instagram (30%) and Facebook (20%) compared to women (15%; 13%) (see **figure 6.24**).

Figure 6.24: Long video news (+6 minutes) use on social media by gender (%)



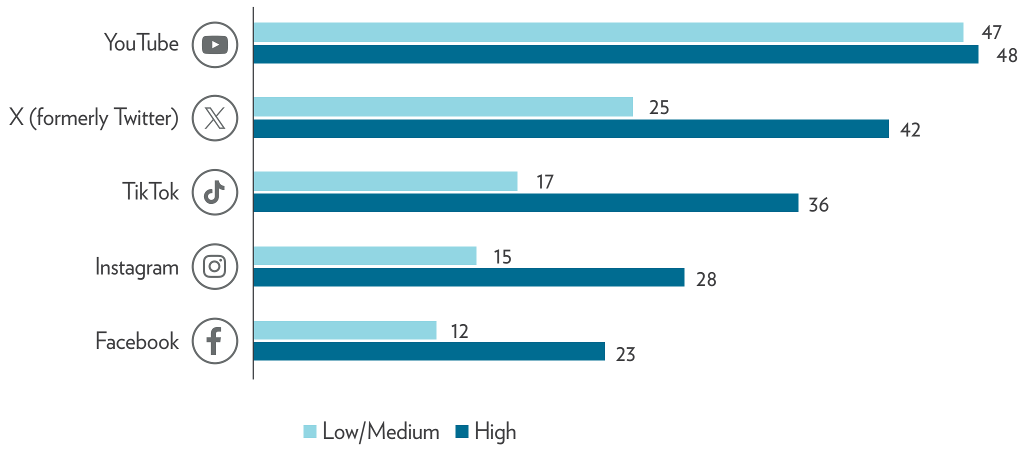
As with live news, long news videos are generally more popular with younger audiences than older. Half of those under 35 say they have watched a long news video on YouTube, but almost half of those aged 35+ (46%) say the same. On other platforms, however, 35+ respondents are much less likely to be consuming long news videos (see **figure 6.25**).

Figure 6.25: Long video news (+6 minutes) use on social media by age (%)



Respondents from all education levels were roughly even in saying they consumed long news videos on YouTube. However, for X (formerly Twitter) (42%), TikTok (36%), Instagram (28%) and Facebook (23%), respondents with high education were more likely than those with low or medium education to say they were accessing long news videos (see **figure 6.26**). This may be because those with higher education tend to have higher levels of interest in and access for news overall.

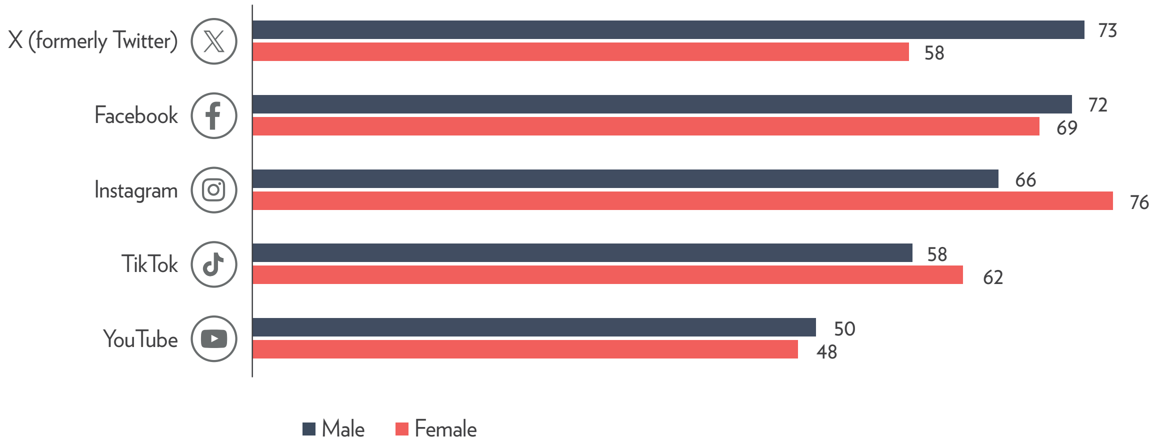
Figure 6.26: Long video news (+6 minutes) use on social media by education (%)



Short news videos are widely used among social media users

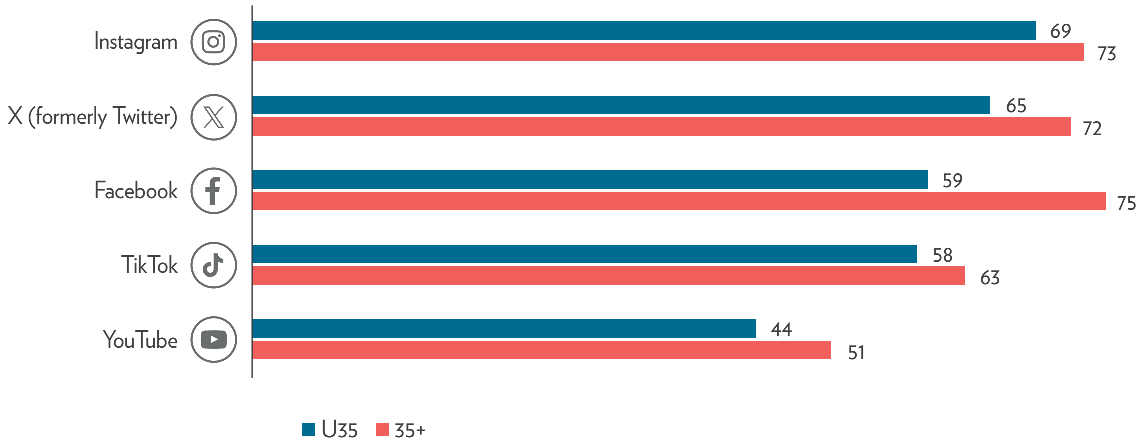
Short news videos of two minutes or less were the most popular format for news videos overall. As such, there is less of a gender gap on most platforms for use of this format. Men (73%) are more likely to say they have seen a short news video on X (formerly Twitter) compared to women (58%), while women (76%) are more likely than men (66%) to say they have seen one on Instagram (see **figure 6.27**).

Figure 6.27: Short video news (2 minutes or less) use on social media by gender (%)



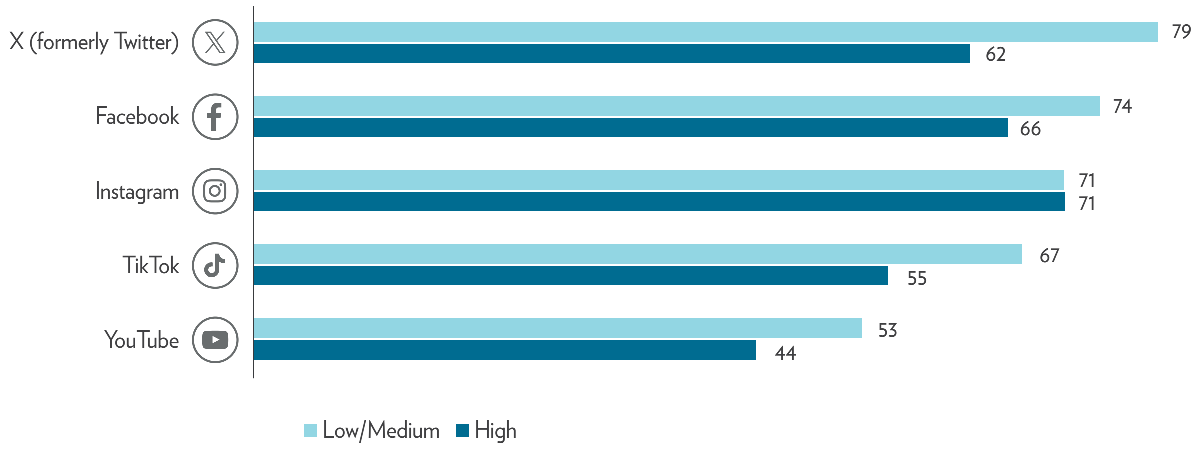
Older respondents are more likely to say they have watched a short news video than younger consumers across all platforms. The biggest gap between younger and older news consumers is on Facebook, where over 35s (75%) are much more likely than under 35s (59%) to watch a short news video there (see **figure 6.28**).

Figure 6.28: Short video news (2 minutes or less) use on social media by age (%)



Respondents with low or medium education are more likely to recall having watched a short news video on most platforms. On Instagram those with low/medium or high education are equal in short news consumption (71%). However, on TikTok, for example, those with low or medium education (67%) are higher in using short news videos than those with high education (55%) (see **figure 6.29**).

Figure 6.29: Short video news (2 minutes or less) use on social media by education (%)

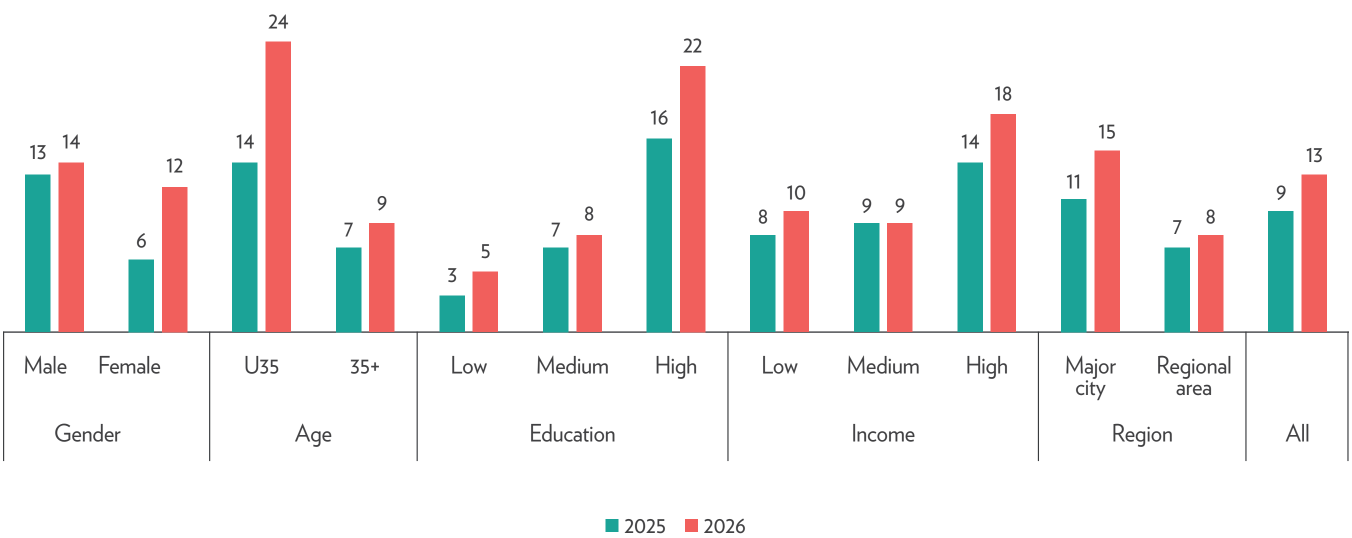


NEWS PODCAST LISTENING

Podcasts for news continues to grow

Our data shows the use of podcasts for news has increased in the past year, particularly among women (12%, +6), younger people (24%, +10), high levels of education (22%, +6) and income (18%, +4), and those living in cities (15%, +4) (see **figure 6.30**).

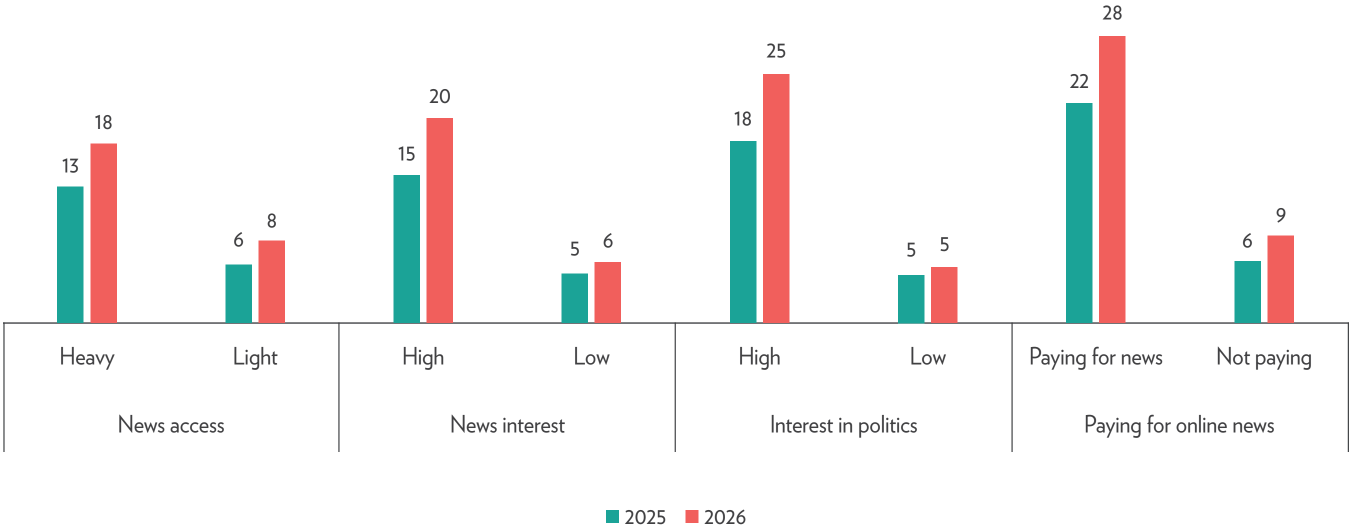
Figure 6.30: Podcast use for news by demographics 2025 – 2026 (%)



[Q3] Which, if any, of the following have you used in the _last week_ as a _source of news_? Please select all that apply. Podcasts about news [Base: *n* = 2,025]

Heavy news consumers (18%, +5), those with higher levels of interest in news (20%, +6) and politics (25%, +7), and paid news users (28%, +6) are increasingly likely to access news via podcasts (see **figure 6.31**).

Figure 6.31: Podcast use for news by news access, news interest, interest in politics and paying for online news 2025 – 2026 (%)



Notably, news podcast listening has increased among those who trust news, rising from 13% in 2025 to 18% this year. At the same time, there was an increase in the use of podcasts for news among those who do not avoid news (17%, +7). Among those who do avoid news, the percentage of those who listen to news podcasts remains unchanged (see **figure 6.32**).

Both right-leaning (16%, +7) and left-leaning (18%, +4) respondents are increasingly turning to podcasts for news. On the other hand, there has been no change among those in the centre (see **figure 6.33**).

Figure 6.32: Podcast use for news by trust in news and news avoidance 2025 – 2026 (%)

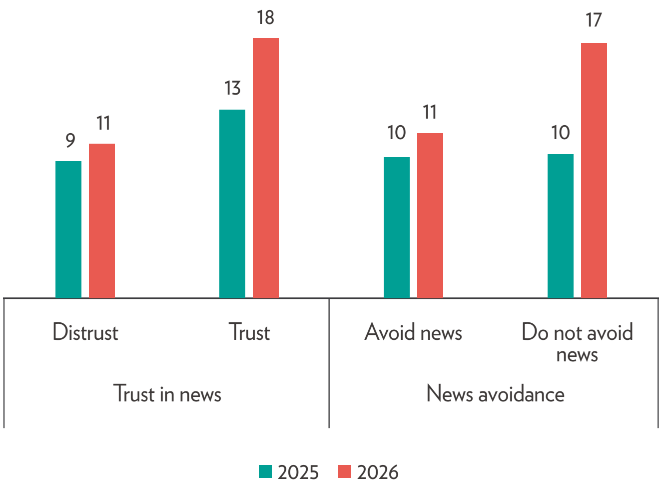
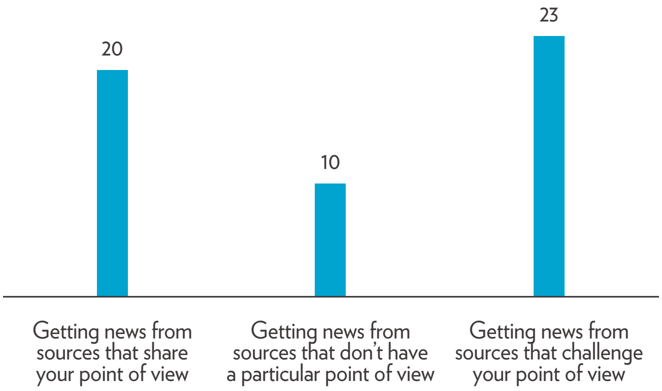


Figure 6.33: Podcast use for news by political orientation (%)

News consumers who prefer to get news from sources that challenges their viewpoints (23%), and those who prefer to get news from sources that share their point of view (20%) are both more likely to listen to podcasts for news than those who prefer news that is neutral (see **figure 6.34**).

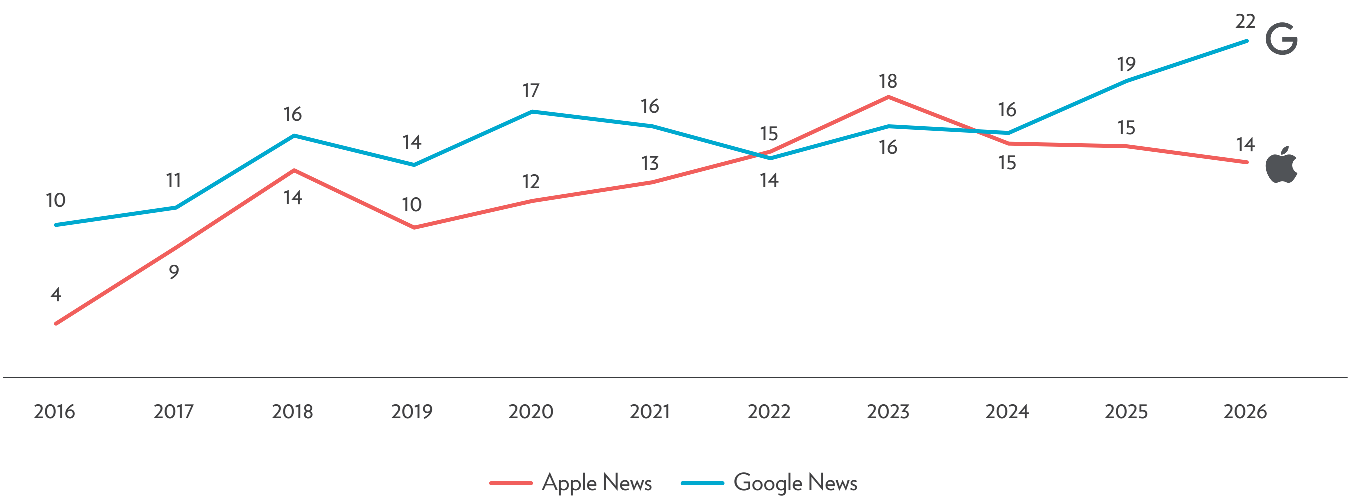
Figure 6.34: Podcasts for news by preference for point of view in news (%)



NEWS AGGREGATOR USE

Google News has continued to grow since 2022. This year, over one in five respondents (22%) report using Google News, up 3 percentage points since 2025. In contrast, Apple News has gradually declined since 2023, falling to 14% this year (see **figure 6.35**).

Figure 6.35: News aggregators use 2016 – 2026 (%)



[Q10c_2025] When using the internet, which of the following, if any, have you used for news in the last week? Please select all that apply. [Base: *n* = 2,025]

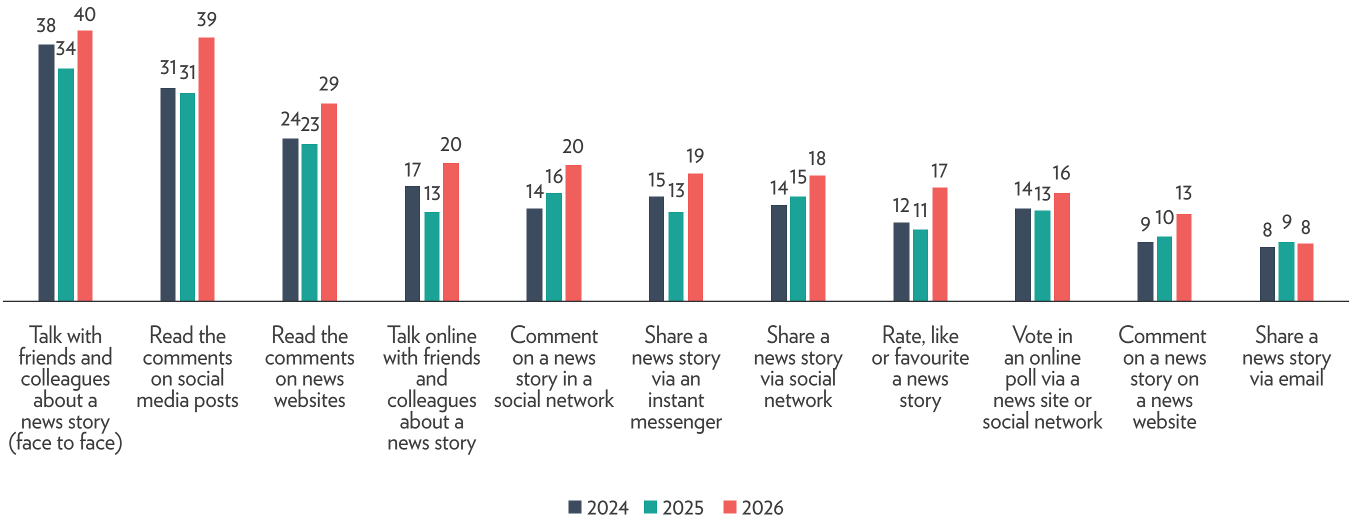
INTERACTING WITH NEWS

Australians engage more actively with news

Overall, Australians' interaction with news has increased. **Figure 6.36** shows that 40% of respondents report talking about news face-to-face with friends or colleagues, a six-percentage point increase since last year. A similar proportion (39%) say they read comments on social media posts, up eight percentage points from 2025.

Respondents are also increasingly engaging in activities such as sharing, rating, and commenting on news via social media and news websites. On the other hand, sharing news stories via email remains low and unchanged (see **figure 6.36**).

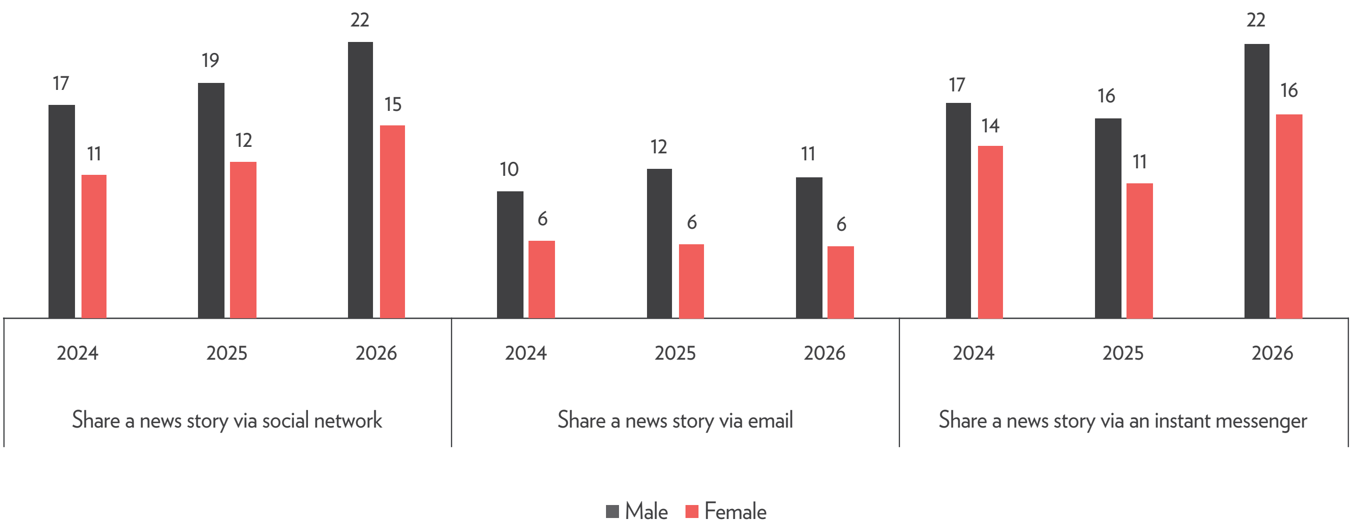
Figure 6.36: Interactions with news 2024 – 2026 (%)



[Q13] During an _average week_ in which, if any, of the following ways do you share or participate in news coverage? Please select all that apply. [Base: *n* = 2,025]

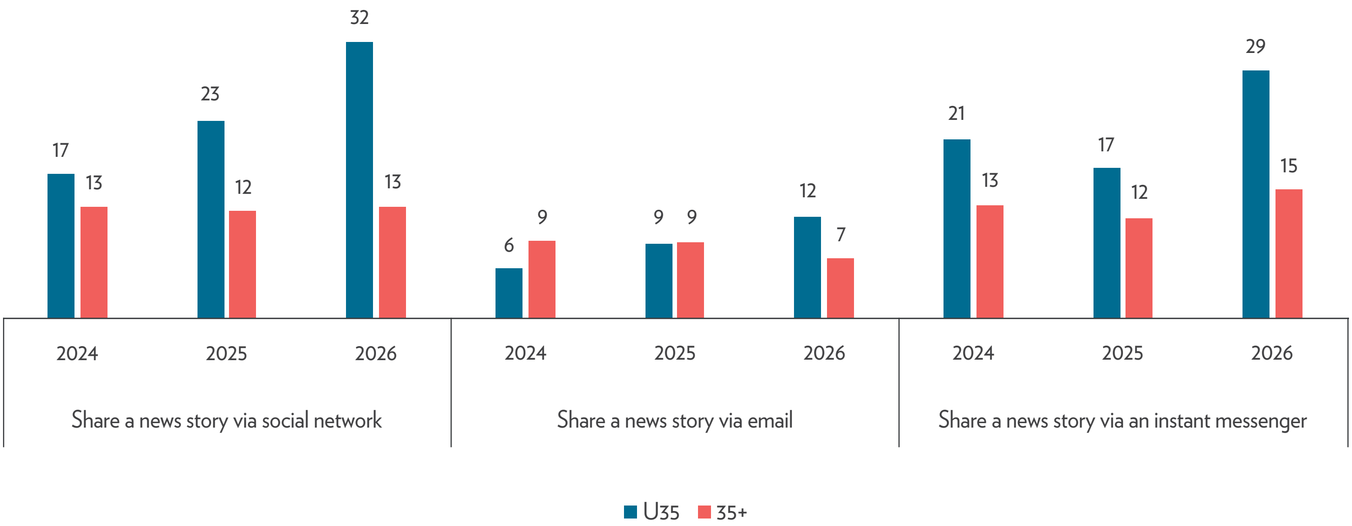
Men and women differ in their news sharing. For all forms of news sharing – across social networks (22%), via email (11%) and via instant messenger (22%) – men are more likely than women to say they share news. Men and women have both increased in their news sharing on social media, with men increasing by 5 percentage points and women by 4 percentage points since 2024 (see **figure 6.37**).

Figure 6.37: Sharing a news story by gender 2024 – 2026 (%)



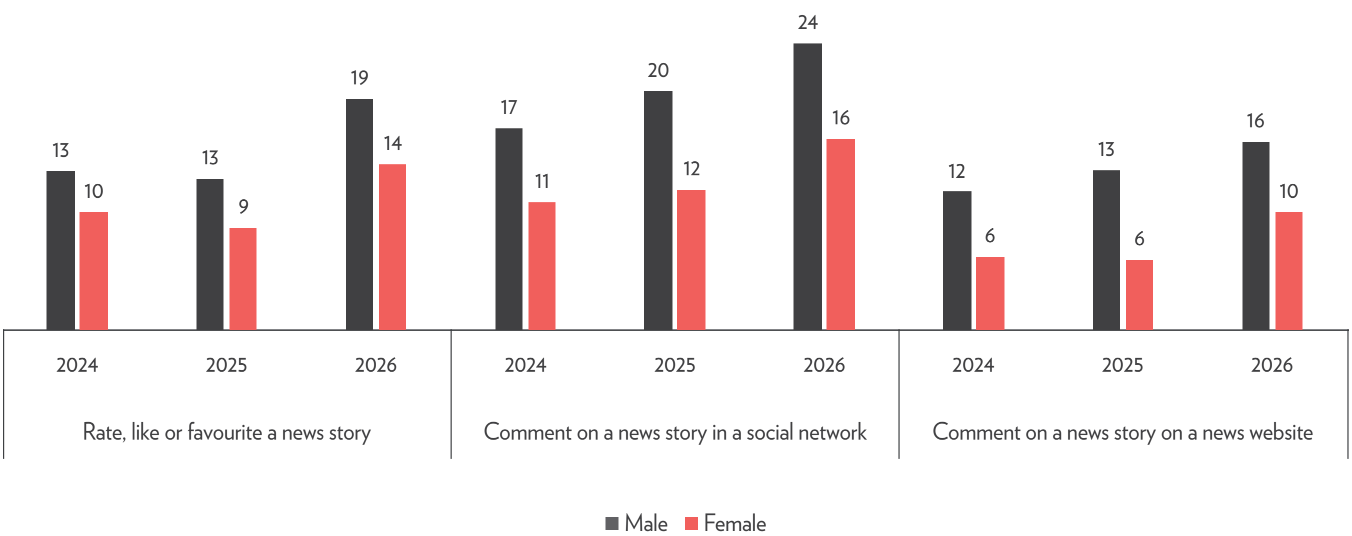
Almost one in three of people U35 say they share news via social media (32%) or an instant messenger (29%) in an average week. Those who are 35+ are much less likely to be sharing across social media (13%), via email (7%) or via an instant messenger (15%) (see **figure 6.38**).

Figure 6.38: Sharing a news story by age 2024 – 2026 (%)



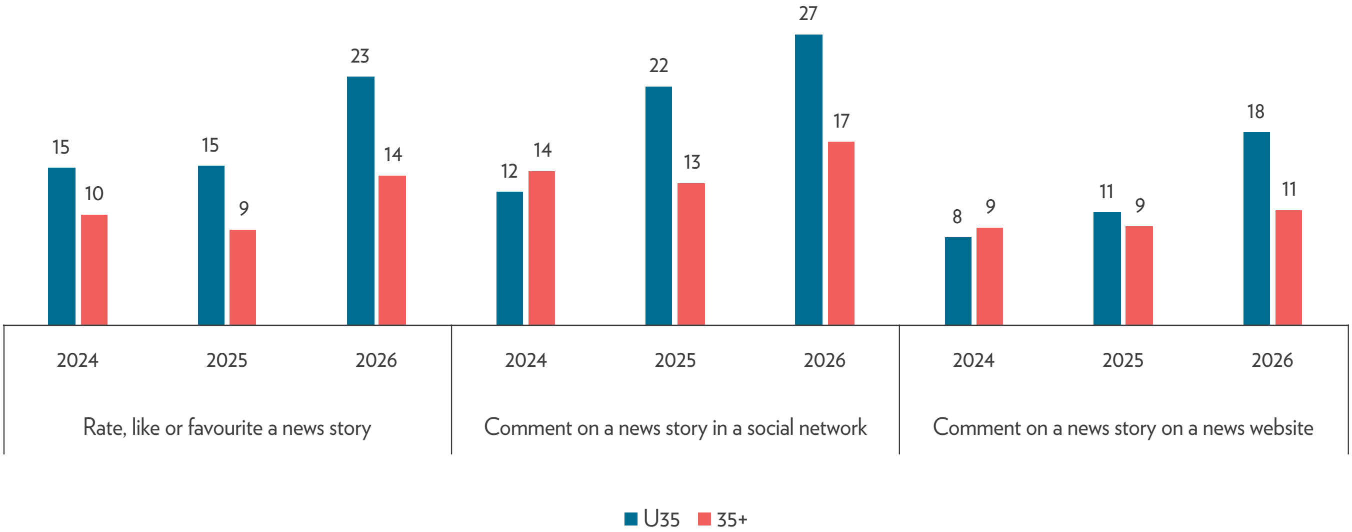
As with sharing, men are more likely to rate, like, favourite or comment on a news story compared to women. Men are particularly high in commenting, with 24% saying they comment on news stories on social media compared to only 16% of women. Sixteen percent of men say they comment on news websites, while only 10% of women say the same. Since 2024, commenting on news stories in social media has increased among both men (+7) and women (+5) (see **figure 6.39**).

Figure 6.39: Rate, like, favourite, or comment on a news story by gender 2024 – 2026 (%)



Young people are generally more likely to rate, like, favourite or comment than older. Under 35s are now more likely to be rating, liking or favouriting stories (23%, +8 since 2024), as well as commenting on news stories on social media (27%, +15) than 35+ (14%; 17% respectively). Growth in these behaviours is growing much faster among young people compared to older (see **figure 6.40**).

Figure 6.40: Rate, like, favourite, or comment on a news story by age 2024 – 2026 (%)



More than half of women U35 read comments about news on social media

Women, regardless of age, like to talk face to face with others about news (U35, 42%; 35+, 40%). However, men U35 are less likely to say they talk about news with others (33%) compared to those aged 35+ (41%). On the other hand, both men and women U35 are more likely to talk online about news with others than those aged 35+ (see **figure 6.41**).

Men U35 (34%) are much more likely than women in the same age group (20%) to comment on a news story on social media. However, women U35 (52%) are more likely to read comments on social media posts than men (48%) (see **figure 6.42**).

Figure 6.41: Talk about news with others face to face and online by gender and age (%)

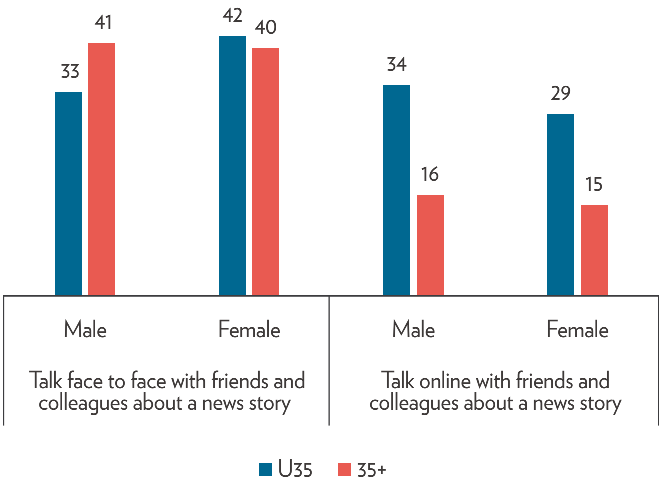
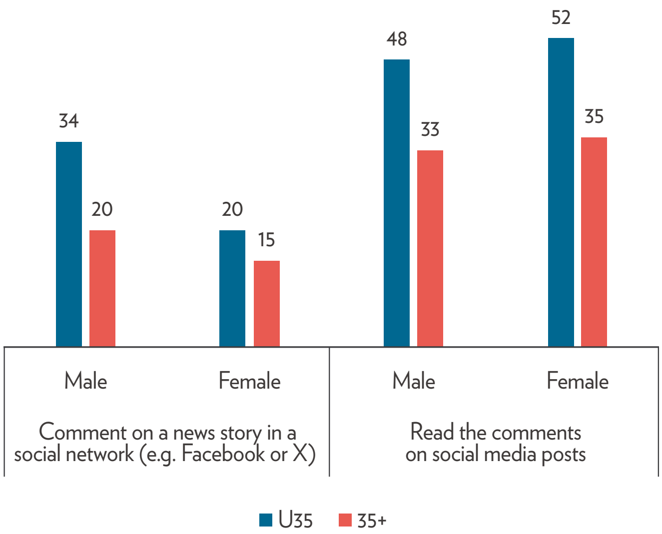


Figure 6.42: Comment on news stories and read comments on social media by gender and age (%)



SUMMARY

The data this year show the continued growth of social media platforms as sources of news. The growth mainly occurred among video-based platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Instagram, as well as instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp. TikTok is now used for news by almost half of 18-24-year-olds and it is the top social media platform for news among this cohort, overtaking Instagram for the first time.

Facebook use for news continues to rise this year as it remains the most used platform for news among Australians. It is also the most popular app people access to get video news, which may partly explain the growth in the use of Facebook for news as their algorithms may have changed to prioritise Reels.

Recent trends in digital media have been heavily shaped by the shift to video-based content. This is particularly the case as TikTok, Reels and Shorts have become popular mediums for content distribution. This year nearly three quarters of respondents say they watched an online news video, with Facebook and YouTube overtaking news websites and apps as the most popular place to watch video news content.

In general, news videos on social platforms are most popular among men under 35; however, Facebook is also widely used for news videos among women. YouTube and Facebook both hold significant audiences among those over 35.

This year we asked people about the length of news videos they watched online in the last week. Short news videos under 2 minutes are the most commonly watched format, followed by videos of 2 to 5 minutes in length. Live news and longer news formats are less popular overall but appear to be more popular among high educated consumers.

Different audience segments seem to vary in their preference for length of news videos. Men appear to be much more interested in news videos on TikTok than women. Young people are generally more likely to watch longer news videos than older, with older people and women more likely to watch short videos on Instagram and TikTok. This points to a complex set of consumer behaviours that may be difficult to predict.

This year we have seen an increase in the use of podcasts for news. Podcast listening is more popular among men and highly educated, but women are catching up. Those who trust news, pay for news and are interested in politics are more likely to go to podcasts as a source of news.

As news consumption generally increased among Australians (see Chapter 5), more people are also interacting with news. Sharing, liking, rating, commenting and other behaviours on social media have been rising over the last three years, with men and young people growing a little faster than other groups.

Some of these news interaction behaviours appear to have a gendered dimension. Men appear to be more likely to engage, while women appear to be more likely to read other people's comments. One possible explanation is that women may be more inclined to self-censor when their comments could be exposed to hostile users. It is also likely, given that women are more likely to talk about news in person, that women desire news consumption to be a more social experience.

7 TRUST AND MISINFORMATION

- Trust in *my news* rose among under 35s (60%, +6), and traditional brands experienced a trust bump.
- Audiences trust *my news* (54%, +5) more than twice as much as news on social media (21%) or from AI chatbots (19%).
- High quality coverage of major issues is linked to higher trust in news.
- More than three quarters (77%, +3) are concerned about what is real or fake on the internet.
- Half of news consumers distrust news on social media (51%) and AI chatbots (49%).

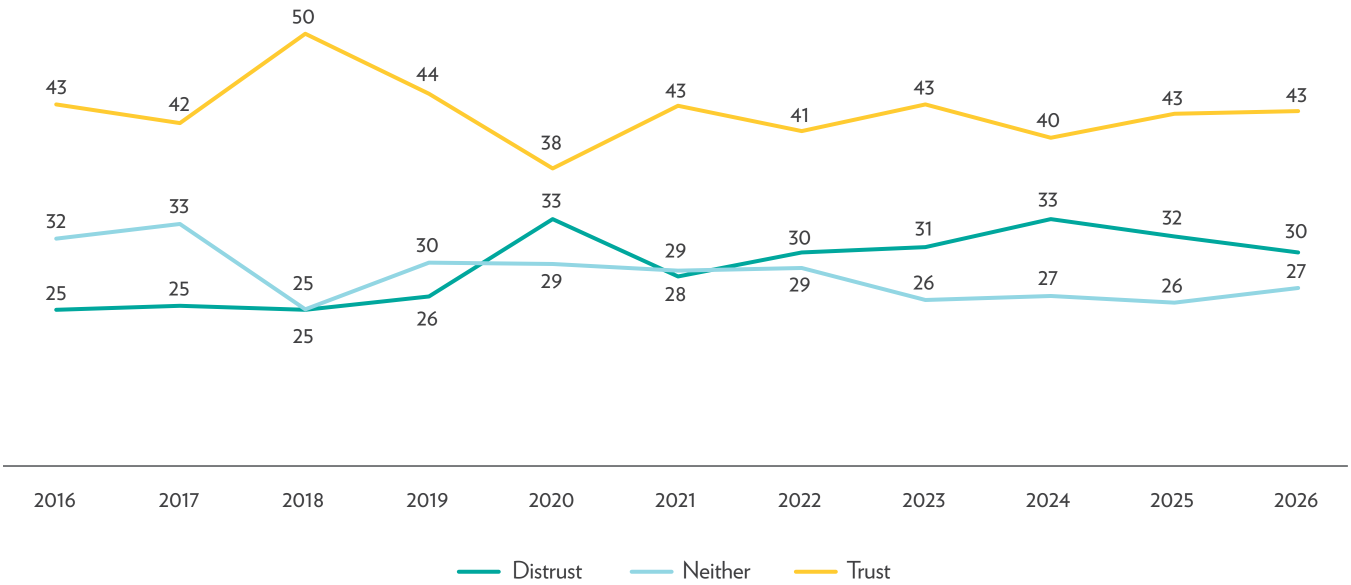
TRUST IN NEWS

Trust remains steady as young people turn to trusted news sources

Each year we ask respondents whether they trust news generally and whether they trust the news they personally choose to consume (*my news*). Trust in news in general remains at 43%, with distrust in news falling slightly in the past two years, from 33% to 30% (see **figure 7.1**).

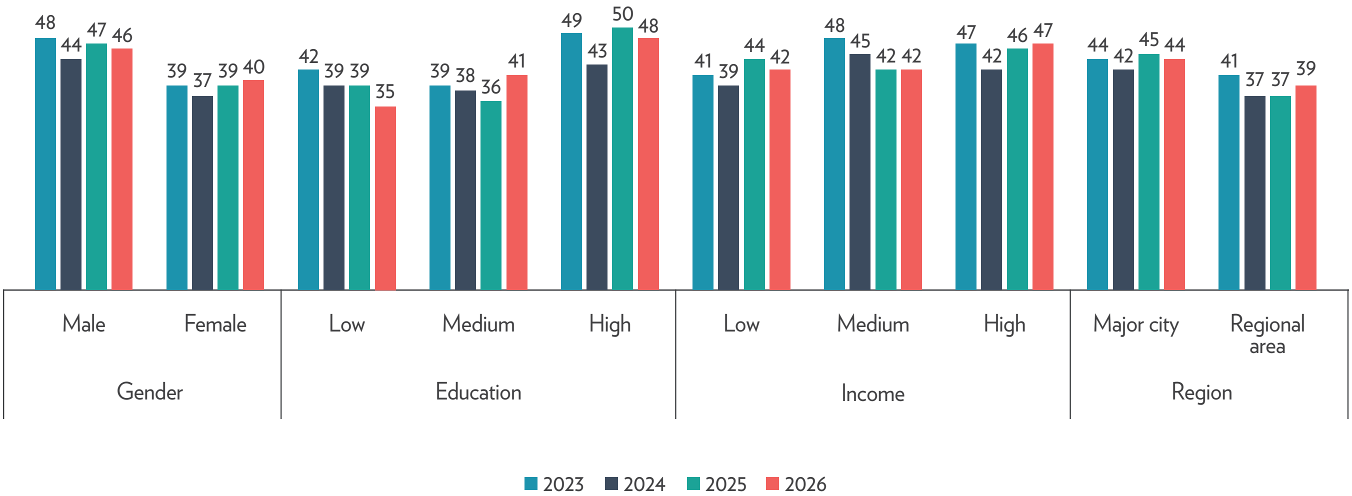
Overall, levels of trust have not changed since 2023, but some demographics had slight variations since last year. For those with low education, trust fell from 39% to 35%. However, those with medium education (41%, +5) rose slightly (see **figure 7.2**).

Figure 7.1: Trust in news 2016 – 2026 (%)



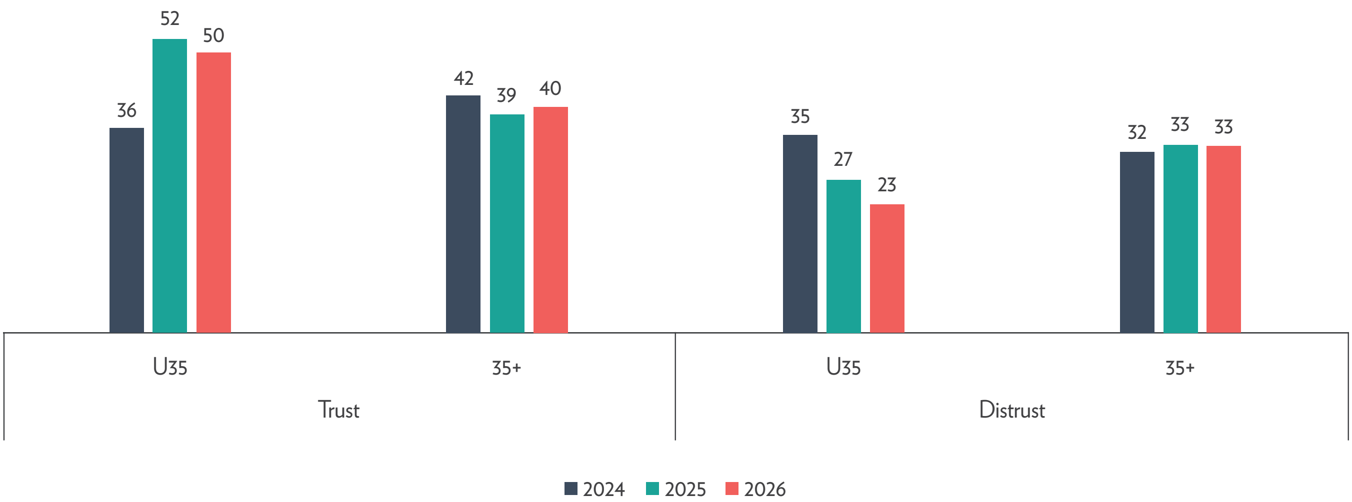
[Q6_2016] We are now going to ask you about trust in the news. First we will ask you about how much you trust the news as a whole within your country. Then we will ask you about how much you trust the news that you choose to consume. I think you can trust most news most of the time. [Base: *n* = 2,025]

Figure 7.2: Trust in news by demographics 2023 – 2026 (%)



As discussed in **Chapter 5**, young people have been increasing their use of news and are paying more attention to trusted news sources. This is possibly reflected in under 35s and their declining levels of distrust since 2024. Only 23% of under 35s say they distrust the news in Australia as a whole, compared to 35% in 2024 (see **figure 7.3**).

Figure 7.3: Trust and distrust in news by age 2024 – 2026 (%)



News payment and the use of traditional news sources have long been associated with higher levels of trust. In 2026, those who pay for news online (54%) have considerably higher trust in the news compared to those who do not pay (40%), but this represents a decline in trust among news payers since 2025 (-12) (see **figure 7.4**).

Those who say their main source of news is social media (33%) have much lower trust in the news ecosystem than those who mainly use TV (53%) (see **figure 7.5**).

Figure 7.4: Trust in news by paying for online news 2025 – 2026 (%)

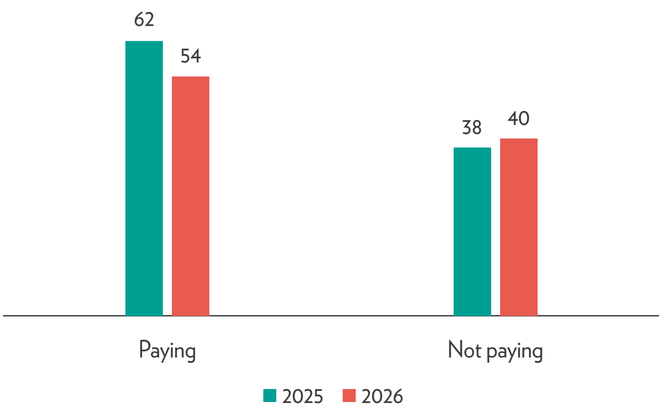
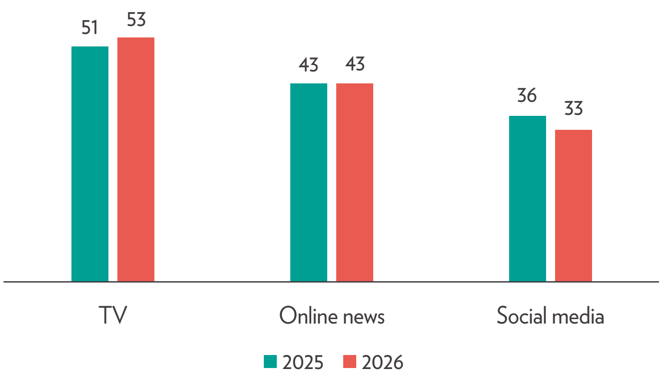
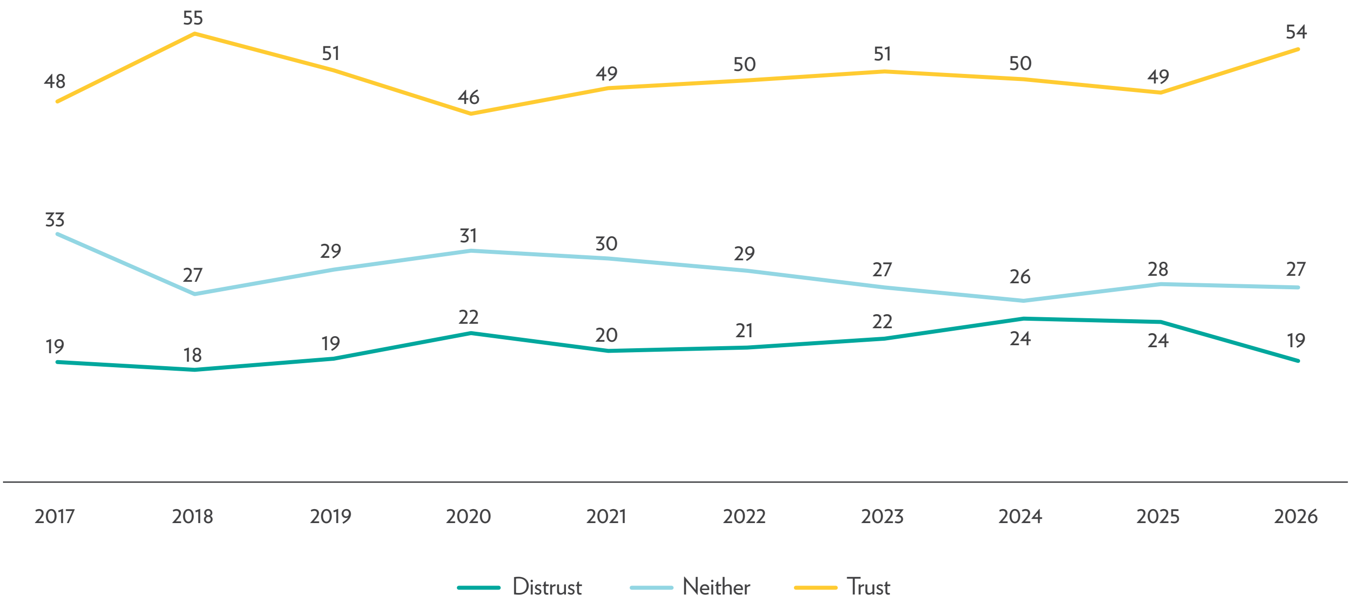


Figure 7.5: Trust in news by main source of news 2025 – 2026 (%)



For the first time since 2020, trust in *my news* has increased and distrust has decreased. This year, 54% (+5) of respondents say they trust *my news*, while only 19% (-5) say they distrusted it (see **figure 7.6**).

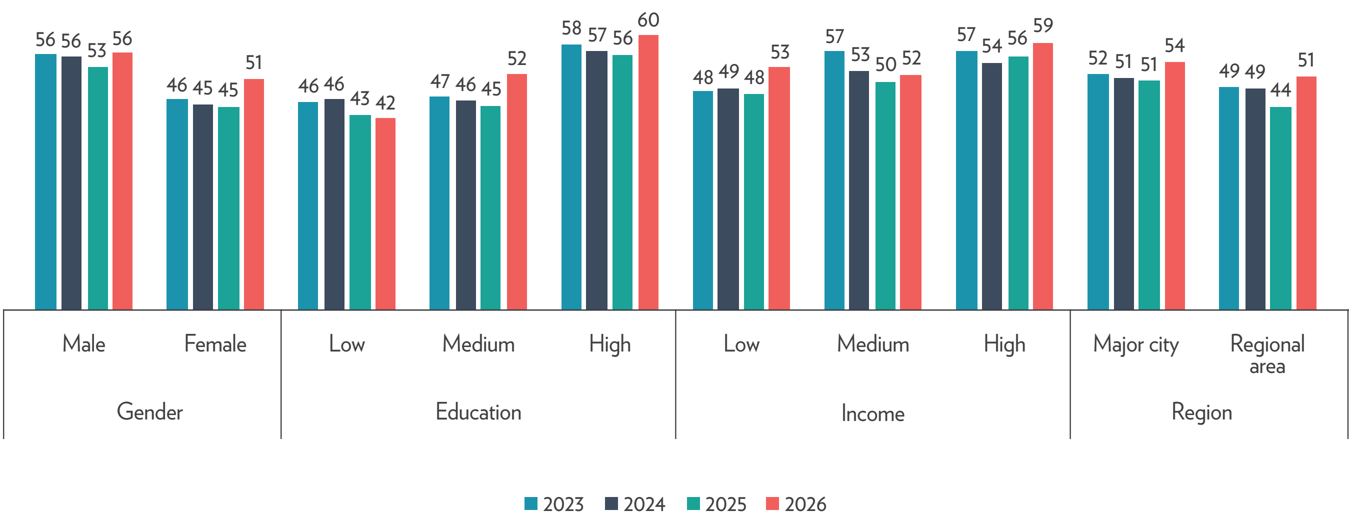
Figure 7.6: Trust in *my news* 2017 – 2026 (%)



[Q6_2016] We are now going to ask you about trust in the news. First we will ask you about how much you trust the news as a whole within your country. Then we will ask you about how much you trust the news that you choose to consume. I think I can trust most of the news I consume most of the time. [Base: *n* = 2,025]

This uptick in trust in *my news* is reflected the most among women (51%, +6), those with medium (52%, +7) and high education (60%, +4), those with low income (53%, +5), and those living in regional areas (51%, +7) (see **figure 7.7**).

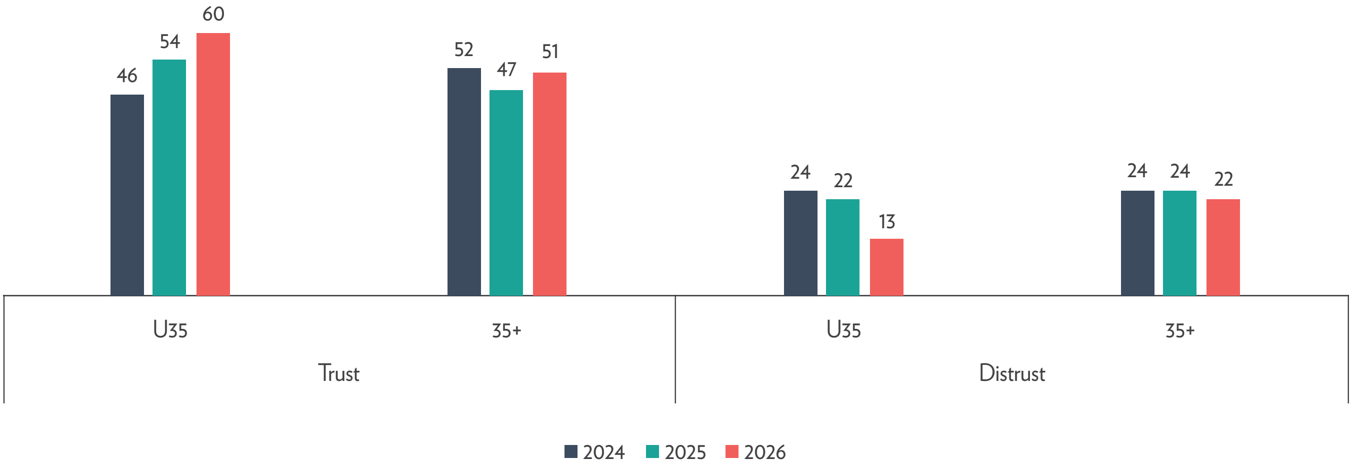
Figure 7.7: Trust in *my news* by demographics 2023 – 2026 (%)



U35s turn to trusted sources of news

Moreso than with news in general, there is a clearer trend in increasing trust in the news under 35s choose to consume. Trust in *my news* has increased from 46% to 60% since 2024 for those under 35 and distrust has declined from 24% to 13%. It is notable that for those 35+, trust in the news they choose to consume has not changed (see **figure 7.8**).

Figure 7.8: Trust and distrust in *my news* by age 2024 – 2026 (%)



The long-term trend in trust had previously been that older people tended to have higher trust than younger. Between 2019 and 2024, respondents under 35 were consistently less likely than 35+ to say they trust news generally, as well as the news they chose to consume. Since last year this has flipped, with under 35s having higher levels of trust in news and *my news* than older people (see **figures 7.9** and **7.10**).

Figure 7.9: Trust in news by age 2019 – 2026 (%)

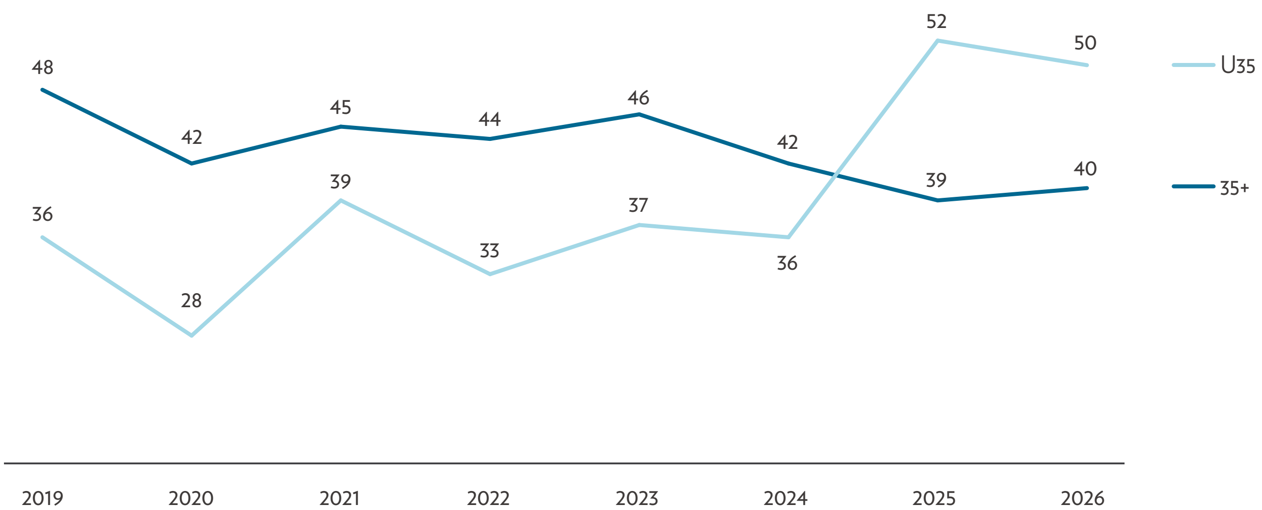
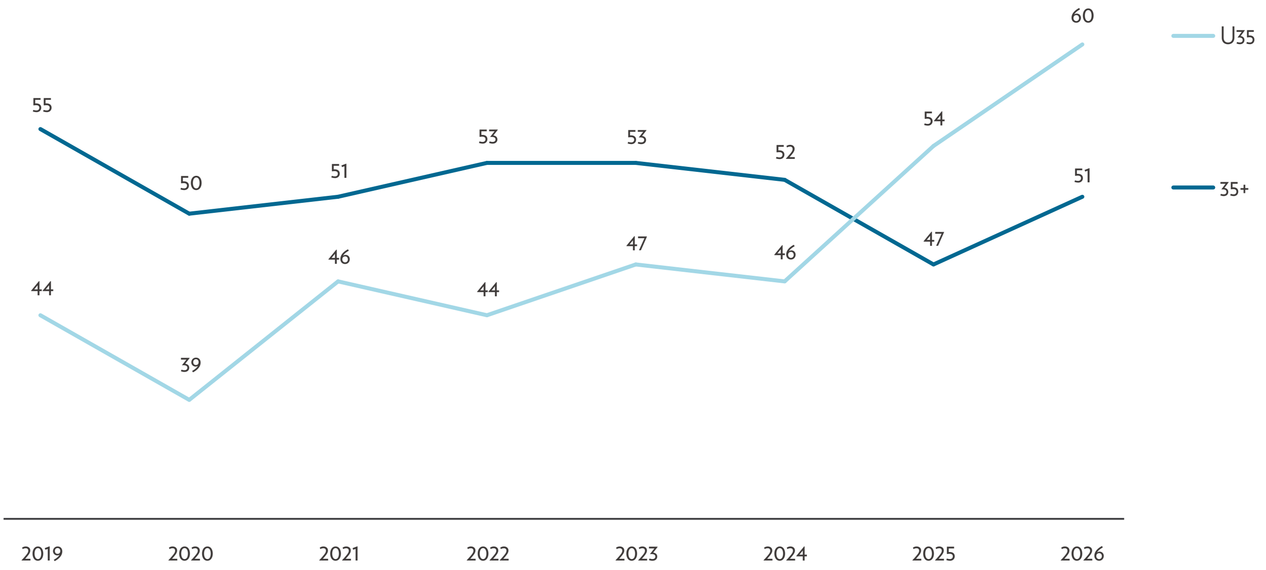
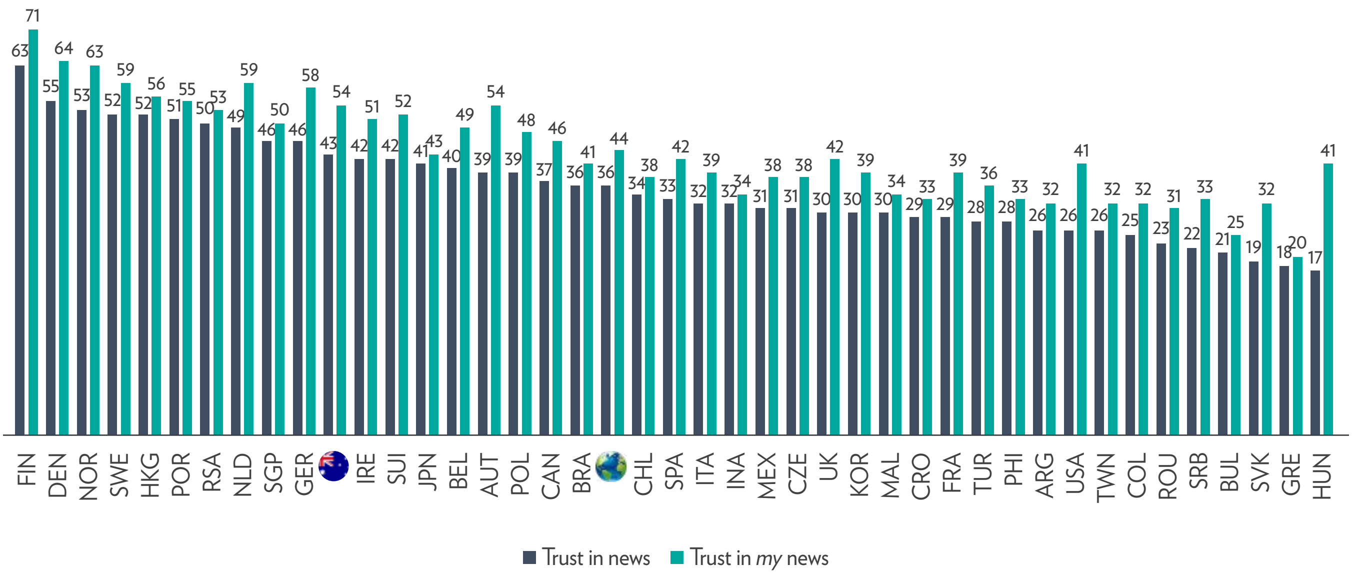


Figure 7.10: Trust in *my news* by age 2019 – 2026 (%)



Compared to other countries, Australians are above average in their levels of trust in both the news as a whole and the news they personally consume. Across 42 markets, 36% say they trust the news in their country and 44% say they trust the news they choose to consume. Countries such as Hungary (17%) and Greece (18%) have some of the lowest levels of news trust, while Scandinavian countries including Finland (63%) and Denmark (55%) have some of the highest. Australia has above average levels of news trust (43%) with trust in the news people choose to consume being over 10 percentage points higher (54%). This positions Australia as being similar to news markets like Belgium, Switzerland, Ireland, Germany and the Netherlands (see **figure 7.11**).

Figure 7.11: Trust in news and trust in *my news* country (%)



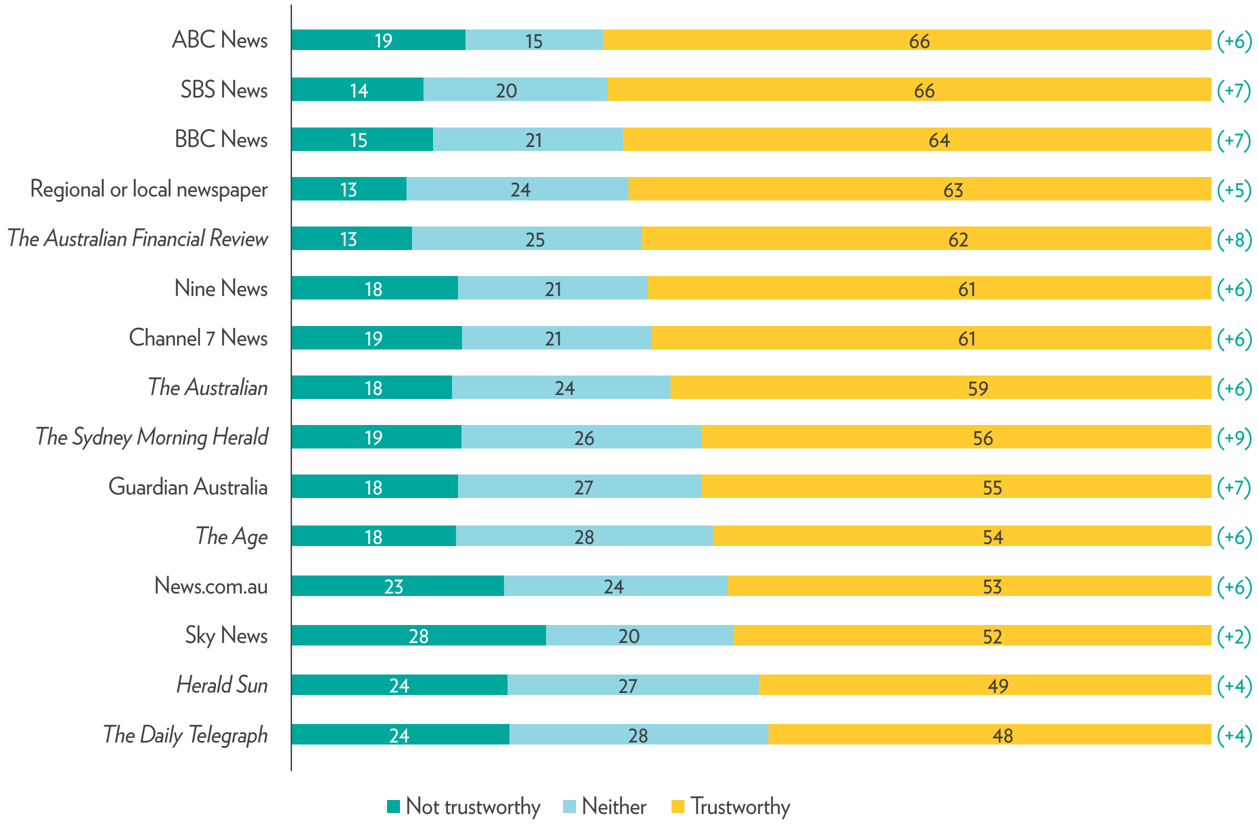
[Base: n = 85,394]

TRUST IN NEWS BRANDS

Trust in news brands recovers

As stated previously, this year saw an increase in the proportion of respondents saying they trust the news they personally choose to consume (54%, +5). The data also show an almost across-the-board increase in trust in news brands, recovering from the drop in 2025. *The Sydney Morning Herald* (+9), *The Australian Financial Review* (+8), SBS News (+7), BBC News (+7), and Guardian Australia (+7) saw the largest increases in trust. For many brands, this represents a recovery from a drop in trust last year (see **figure 7.12**).

Figure 7.12: Trust in news brands (%)



[Q6_2018_trust] How trustworthy would you say news from the following brands is? Please use the scale below, where 0 is 'not at all trustworthy' and 10 is 'completely trustworthy'; Haven't heard of this brand. [Not trustworthy = 0 to 4; Neither = 5; Trustworthy = 6 to 10] [Base: *n* = those who have heard of these news brands: ~2000]

TRUST IN ONLINE NEWS

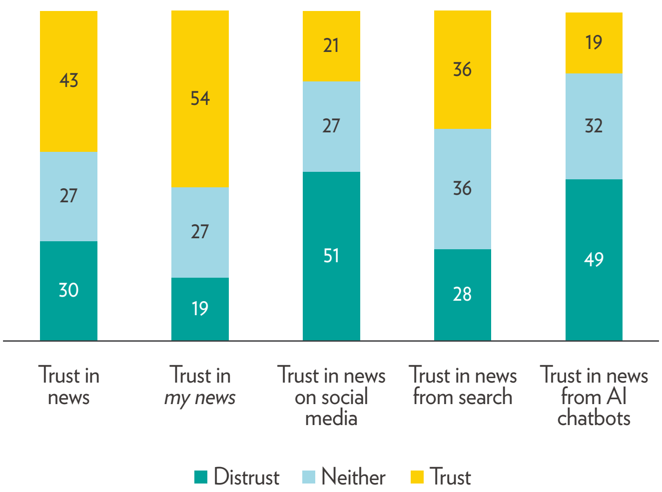
Audiences remain sceptical about news on social media and from AI chatbots

In recent years we have seen a small but growing number of news consumers say they access news from AI chatbots. This year, we asked respondents about their levels of trust in a range of online news sources - social media, search engines, and AI chatbots - in order to compare the levels of trust.

Respondents have the highest levels of trust in the news they personally choose to consume (54%), with news in general (43%) coming second, and news from search (36%) being slightly less trusted. Social media (21%) and AI chatbots (19%) have the lowest levels of trust among audiences, with around half (51%; 49%) saying they distrust news on these platforms (see **figure 7.13**).

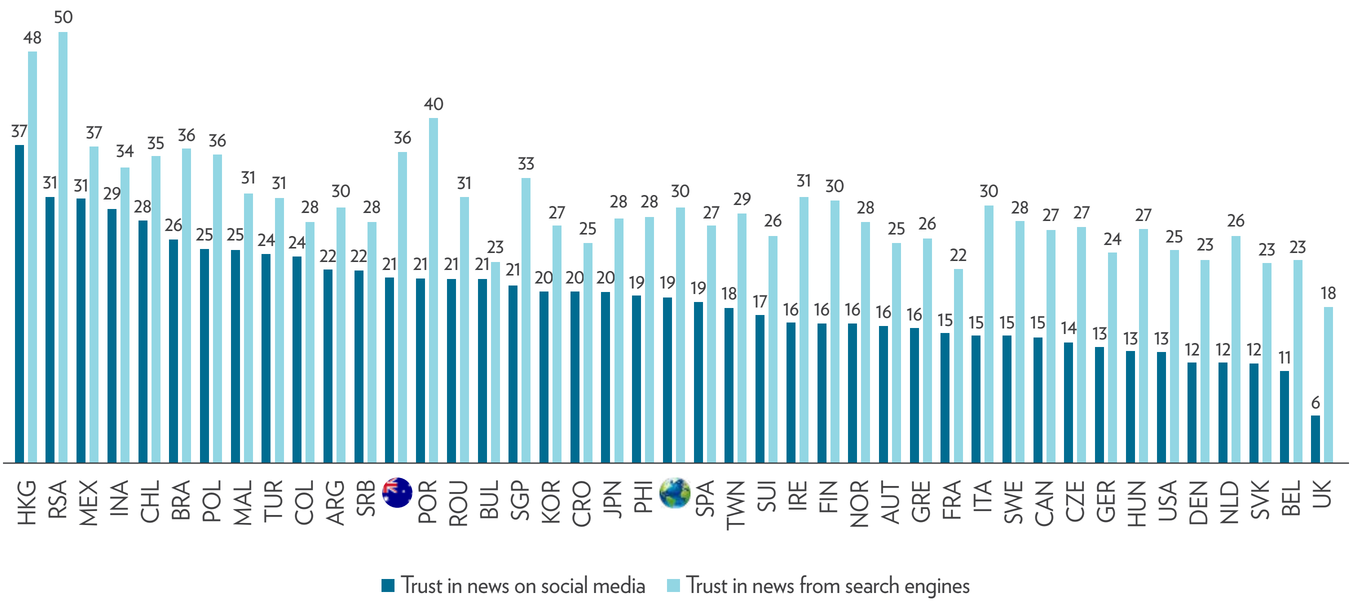
Most markets internationally have low levels of trust in news on social media (19%) with search (30%) being more trusted than social media, but less trusted than personally preferred news sources. There are, however, outliers such as Hong Kong (37%), South Africa (31%), Mexico (31%) and Indonesia (29%), which have higher levels of trust in news on social media (see **figure 7.14**).

Figure 7.13: Trust in news, trust in *my news*, trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots (%)



[Q6_2018] It is now possible to get online news in many different ways. With this in mind, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. [Q6_2018_2] I think I can trust news in social media most of the time [Q6_2018_3] I think I can trust news in search engine results most of the time [Q6_2018_4] I think I can trust news in answers from AI chatbots most of the time. [Base: *n* = 2,025]

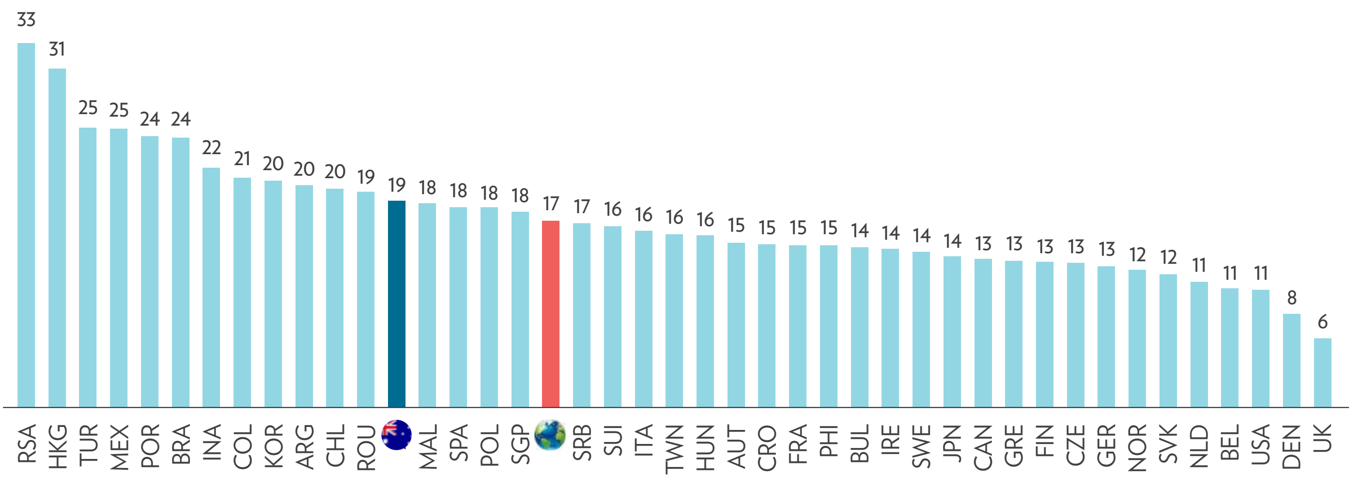
Figure 7.14: Trust in news on social media and trust in news from search by country (%)



[Base: *n* = 85,394]

Across 42 markets, Australians (19%) are slightly above the global average (17%) in levels of trust in news from AI chatbots. South Africa is a substantial outlier (33%) where trust in news from AI chatbots exceeds trust in news from social media by 2 percentage points. The UK (6%), Denmark (8%), Belgium (11%) and the USA (11%) have some of the lowest levels of trust in news from AI chatbots (see **figure 7.15**).

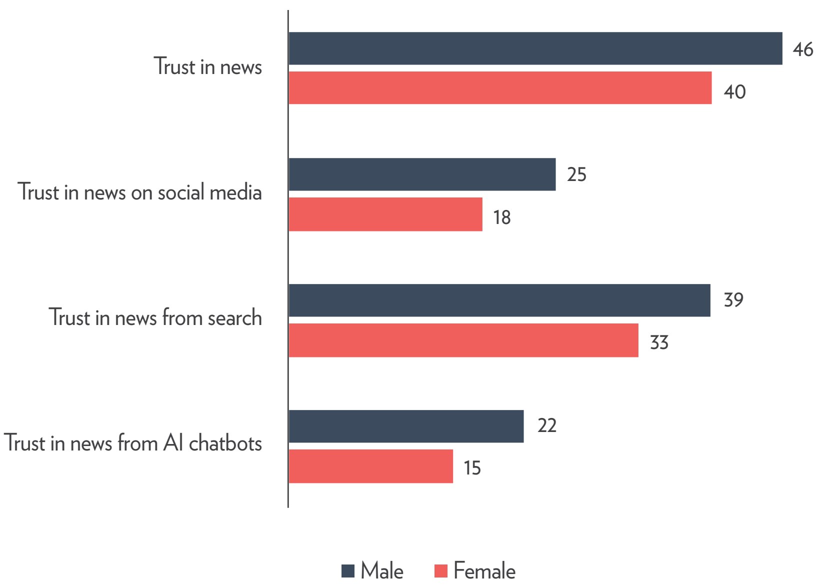
Figure 7.15: Trust in news from AI chatbots by country (%)



[Base: *n* = 85,394]

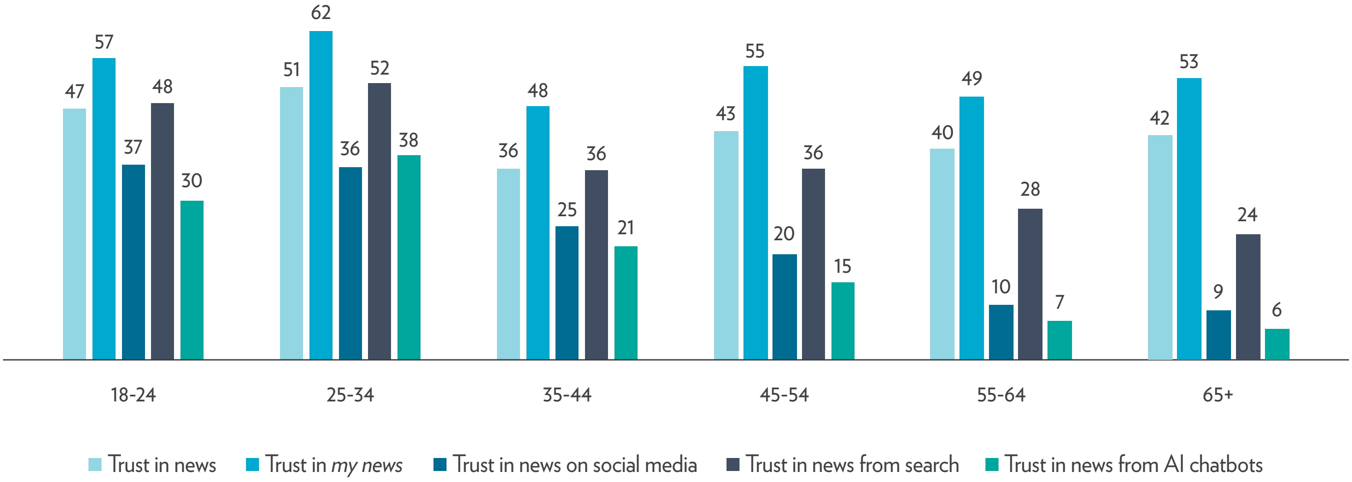
Looking at variance between demographic groups, men are consistently more likely to say they trust news from all sources. The trust gap is fairly consistent with men being higher than women in trust in news (6pp gap), trust in news on social media (7pp gap), trust in news from search (6pp gap) and trust in news from AI chatbots (7pp gap) (see **figure 7.16**)

Figure 7.16: Trust in news, trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots by gender (%)



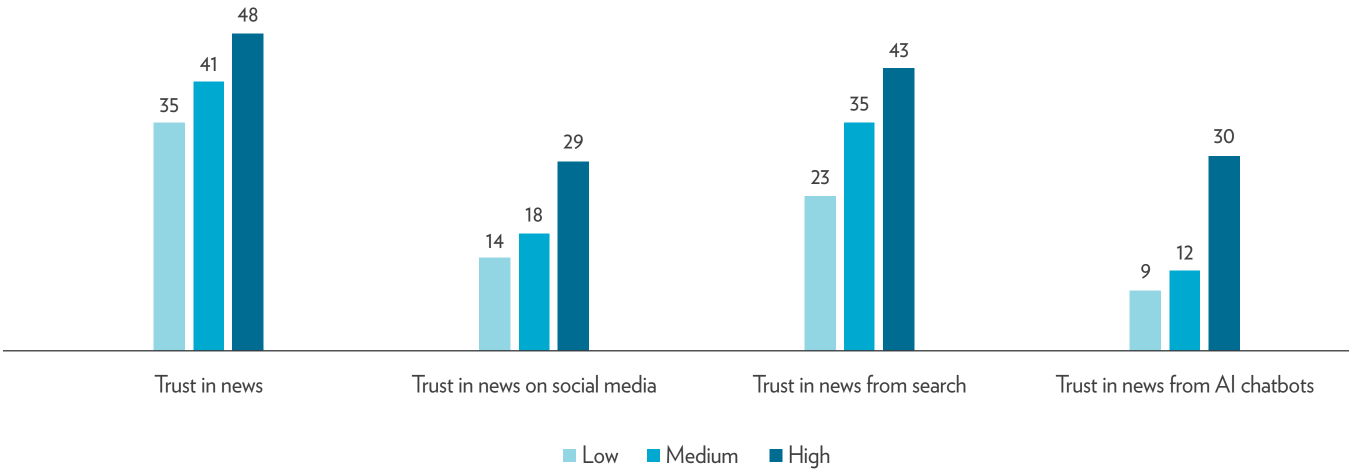
Young people, and particularly 25-to-34-year-olds, are more likely to say they trust news regardless of whether it comes from traditional or online sources. 25-to-34-year-olds are the most likely to say they trust news from search (52%) and AI chatbots (38%), and 18-to-24-year-olds had around the same levels of trust in social media (37%) as those slightly older than them (see **figure 7.17**).

Figure 7.17: Trust in news, trust in *my news,* trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots by age (%)



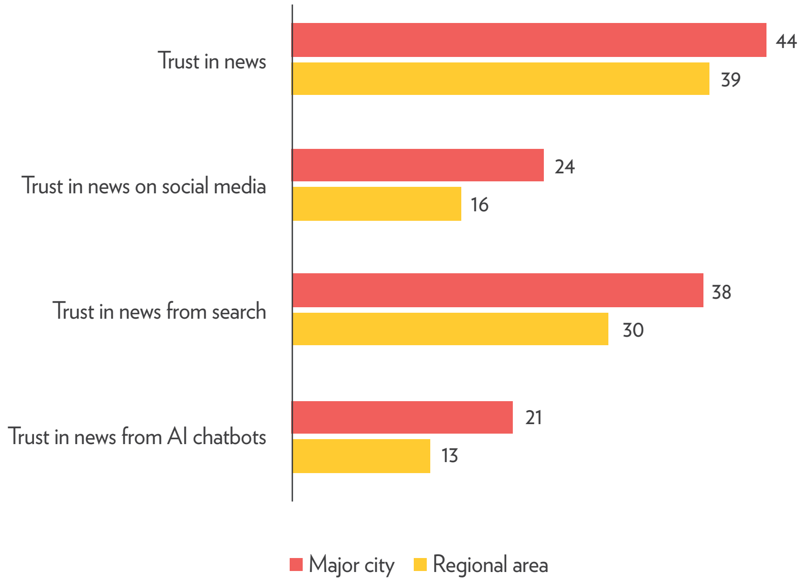
Those with high education are also consistently more likely to say they trust news from online sources. The gap between low and high education is widest when looking at trust in news from search (20pp gap) and trust in news from AI chatbots (21pp gap) (see **figure 7.18**).

Figure 7.18: Trust in news, trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots by education (%)



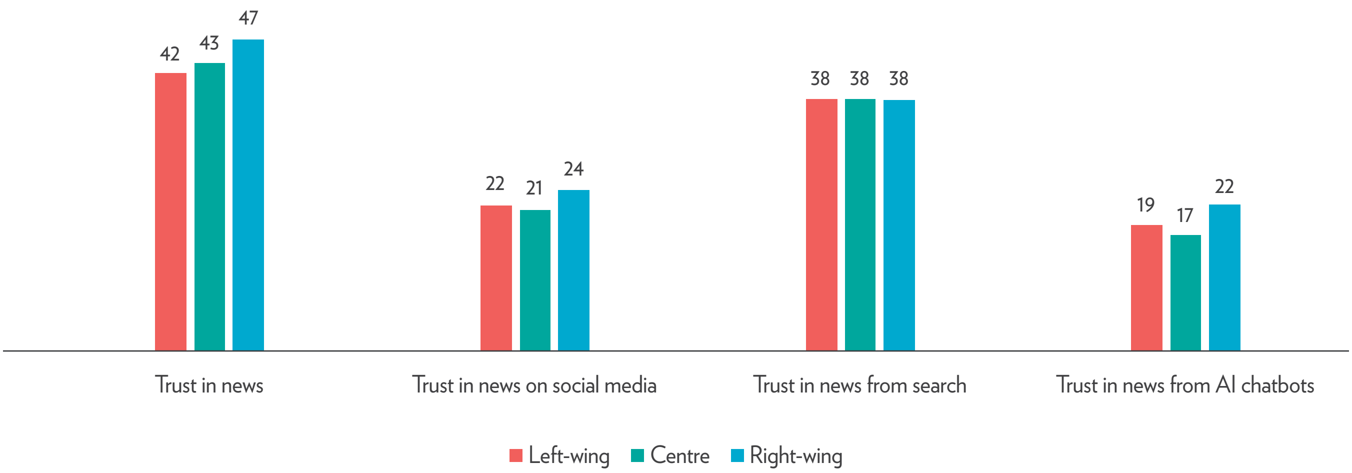
Those who live in major cities are also more likely to say they trust news in general as well as news from social media, search and AI chatbots compared to those living in regional areas. This possibly reflects the fact that city dwellers are more likely to be younger and have higher education (see **figure 7.19**).

Figure 7.19: Trust in news, trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots by region (%)



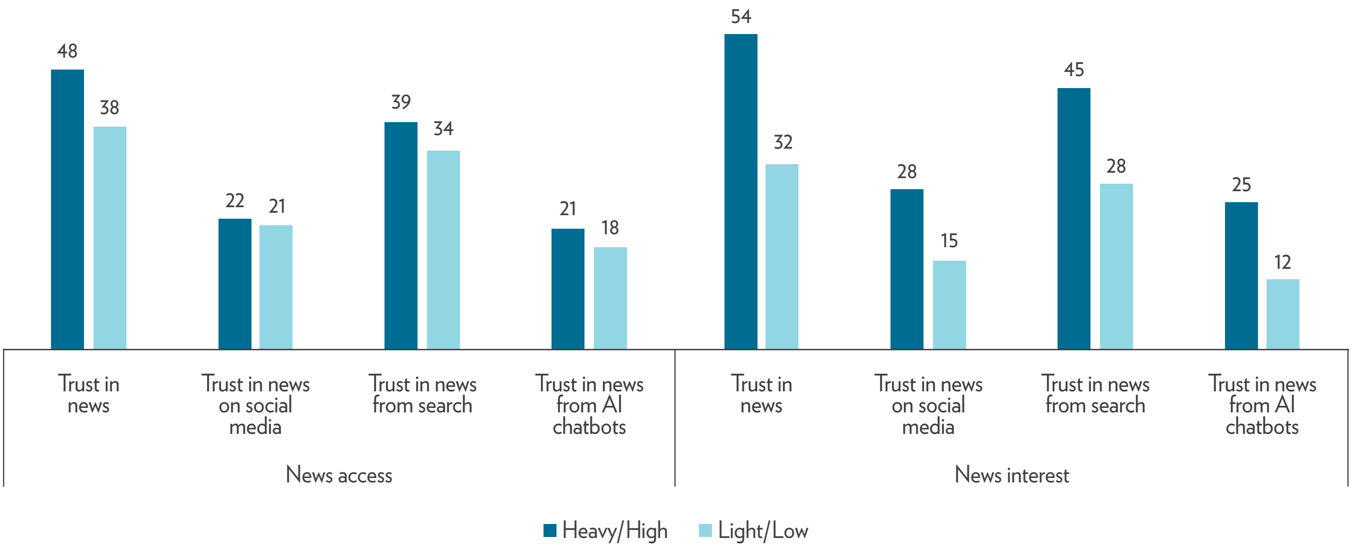
Right-wing respondents are higher in their levels of trust in news (47% vs. 42% for left-wing). However, this does not necessarily translate into right-wing respondents having higher levels of trust in news on search or social media. Right-wing respondents were only two percentage points higher than left-wing in trust in news on social media (24% vs. 22%) and only three percentage points higher in trust in news from AI chatbots (22% vs. 19%) (see **figure 7.20**).

Figure 7.20: Trust in news, trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots by political orientation (%)



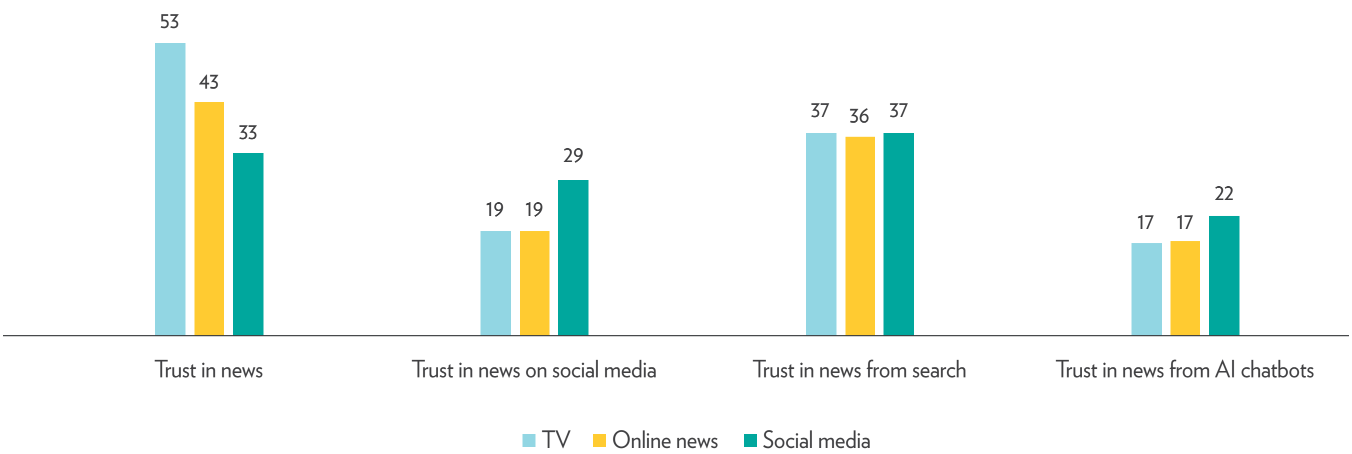
Interestingly, while heavy versus light news consumption appears to predict higher levels of trust for the news in general (48% vs. 38%) and news from search (39% vs. 34%), more frequent news users are not significantly more trusting of news from social media or AI chatbots compared to light news users. Instead, high interest versus low interest in news appears to be a reliable predictor of higher levels of trust in all types of news we asked about (see **figure 7.21**).

Figure 7.21: Trust in news, trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots by news access and news interest (%)



Respondents who say they mainly get their news from social media are lower in their levels of trust in news in general (33%) compared to those who mainly use TV (53%) or online news websites (43%). Compared to other mediums, those who mainly use social media for news are 10 percentage points higher in their levels of trust for news on social media (29%) and 5 percentage points higher for trust in news from AI chatbots (22%). This likely reflects the younger age demographic of those who mainly use social media for news (see **figure 7.22**).

Figure 7.22: Trust in news, trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots by main source of news (%)

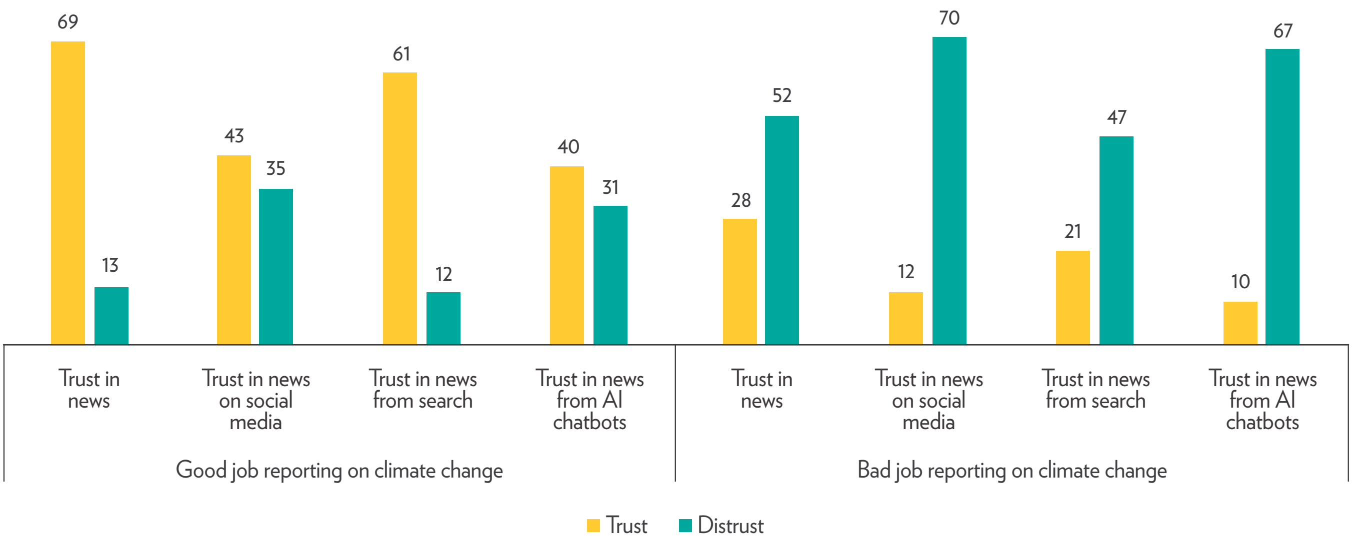


Perceived quality of news is linked to higher trust

This year we asked respondents whether they thought news organisations were doing a good or bad job of reporting on some of the major issues impacting on the world (see **Chapter 1**). Looking at this data, we can see that, regardless of the topic, those who think news is doing a good job of providing coverage have higher levels of trust than those who think it is doing a bad job.

For example, 69% of those who say news is doing a good job of reporting on climate change trust the news ecosystem in Australia in general. This is compared to only 28% of those who say the news is doing a bad job of reporting on climate change (see **figure 7.23**).

Figure 7.23: Trust in news, trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots by quality of reporting on climate change (%)

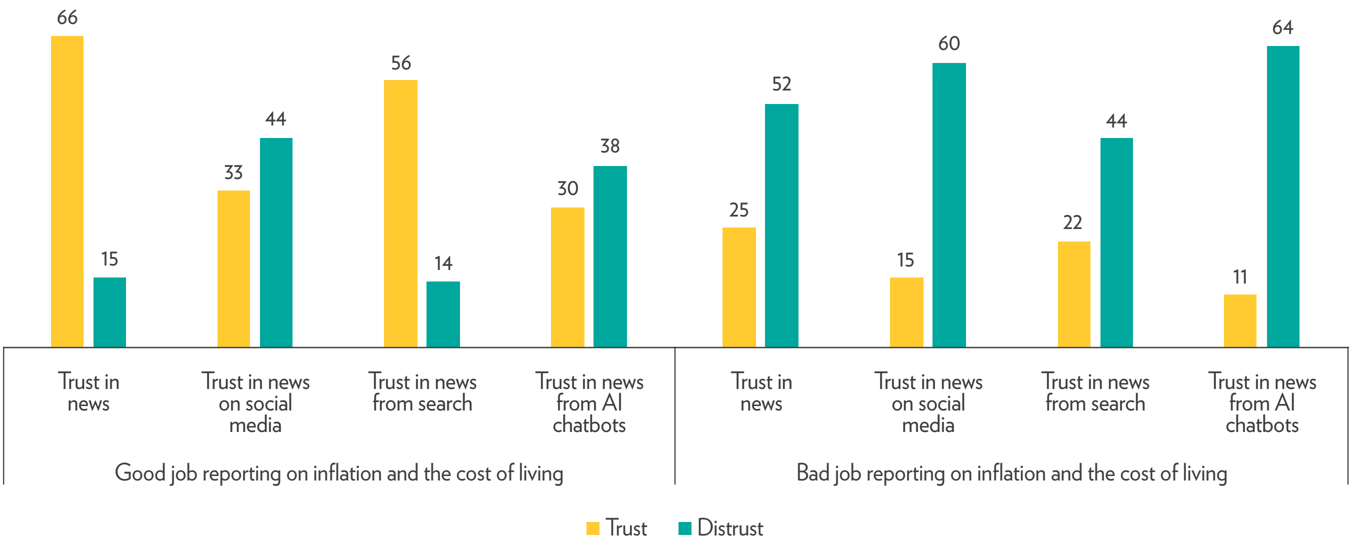


[Q_BigStories] Thinking about the news media in your country, do you think they generally do a good job or a bad job of covering each of the following? [Base: *n* = 2,025]

This trend persists, with some minor variations, when looking at other topics such as inflation and the cost of living. Among those who say the news is doing a good job of covering this issue, 66% trust news generally, 33% news on social media, 56% news from search and 30% news from AI chatbots. Those who think the news is doing a bad job covering inflation and the cost of living are 41pp less likely to trust news (25%), and 34pp less likely to trust news from search engines (22%).

Conversely, those who say the news is doing a bad job are much more likely to say they distrust the news in general (52%), news on social media (60%) and news from AI chatbots (64%). This suggests that perceived poor coverage may be strongly linked to distrust (see **figure 7.24**).

Figure 7.24: Trust in news, trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots by quality of reporting on cost of living (%)

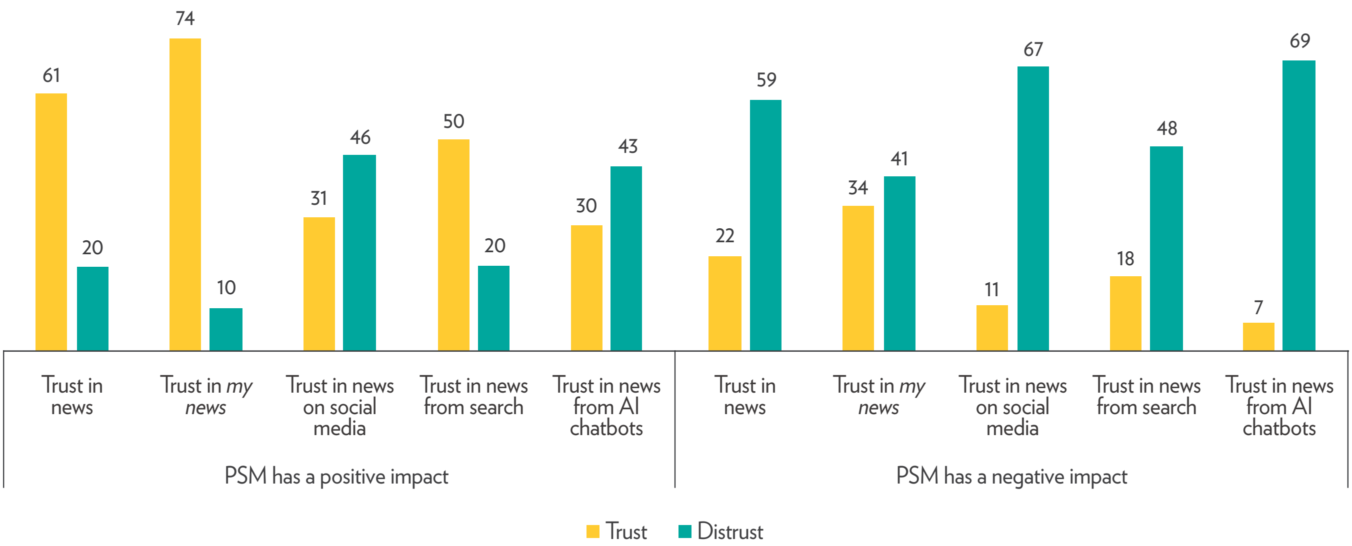


Those with a positive view about public service media have higher trust in news

We also asked respondents whether they believed that news provided by public service broadcasters, such as the ABC and the SBS, has a positive or negative effect on life in Australia. Again, a distinct trend shows that those who believe public service news has a positive impact on Australia are much more likely to trust news in general, their news, and news from online sources.

Among those who say PSM news is having a positive impact, 61% say they trust news in general and 74% say they trust the news they choose to consume. Among those who say PSM news has a negative impact on Australian society only 22% trust the news ecosystem in general and only 34% trust the news they personally choose to consume. Inversely, those who say PSM news has a negative impact on life in Australia are three times as likely to say they distrust the news generally (59%) and four times as likely to say they distrust the news they choose to consume (41%) (see **figure 7.25**).

Figure 7.25: Trust in news, trust in *my news*, trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots by value of public service media (%)



[Q_PSM_Attitude] Overall, do you think that news provided by public service broadcasters (e.g. XYZ) has a positive or negative effect on life in your country? [Base: *n* = 2,025]

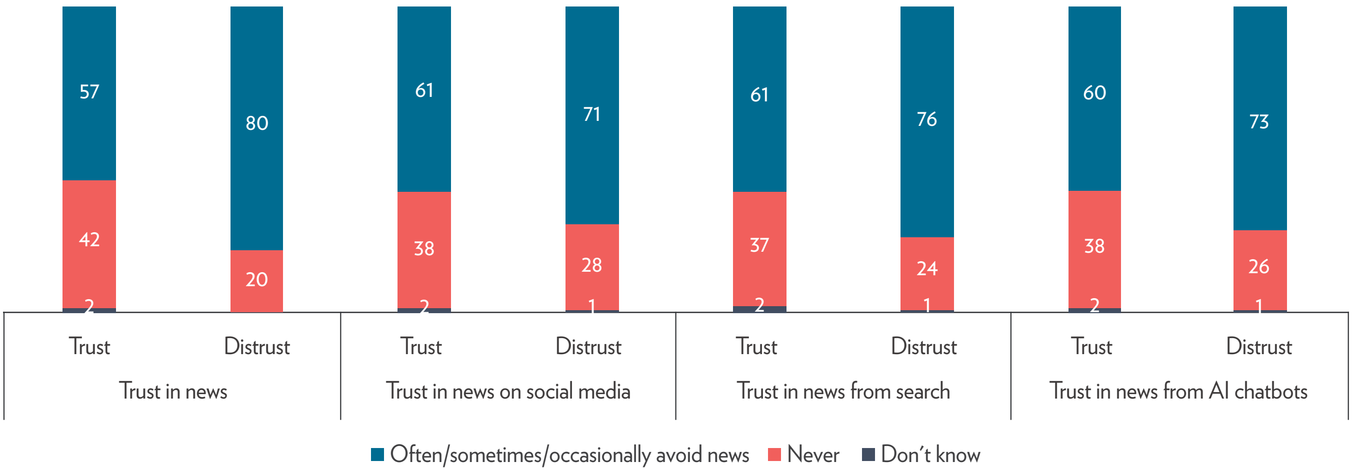
IMPACT OF LOW TRUST

Those who distrust news are news avoiders

The data highlight how attitudes and behaviours are shaped by higher or lower levels of trust. As the above sections have shown, those who rate news organisations as doing a good job of reporting on major issues and those who believe public service media organisations are having a positive impact on life in Australia are much more likely to trust news. There are also some demographic variances, with men, younger people, those with higher education, those who pay for online news and heavier news users being more likely to trust news than other groups.

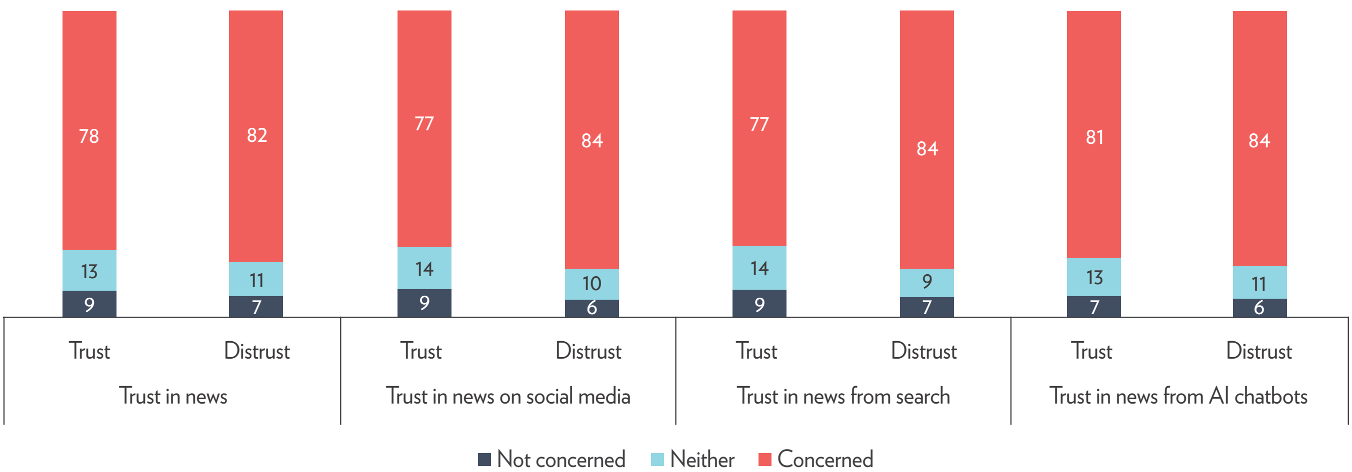
But what results from higher or lower levels of trust? As **figure 7.26** shows, distrust is strongly linked to higher levels of news avoidance. News avoidance is common in Australia. Among those who trust, news 57% say they avoid it often, sometimes or occasionally, but for those who distrust news in general this number jumps to four in five respondents (80%).

Figure 7.26: News avoidance by trust in news, trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots (%)



And while concern about what is real or fake on the internet is also high among all Australians, for those who distrust news, the levels of concern are even higher. Among those who distrust news on social media, 84% say they are concerned about online misinformation, compared to 77% among those who trust news there (see **figure 7.27**).

Figure 7.27: Concern about online misinformation by trust in news, trust in news on social media, trust in news from search and trust in news from AI chatbots (%)

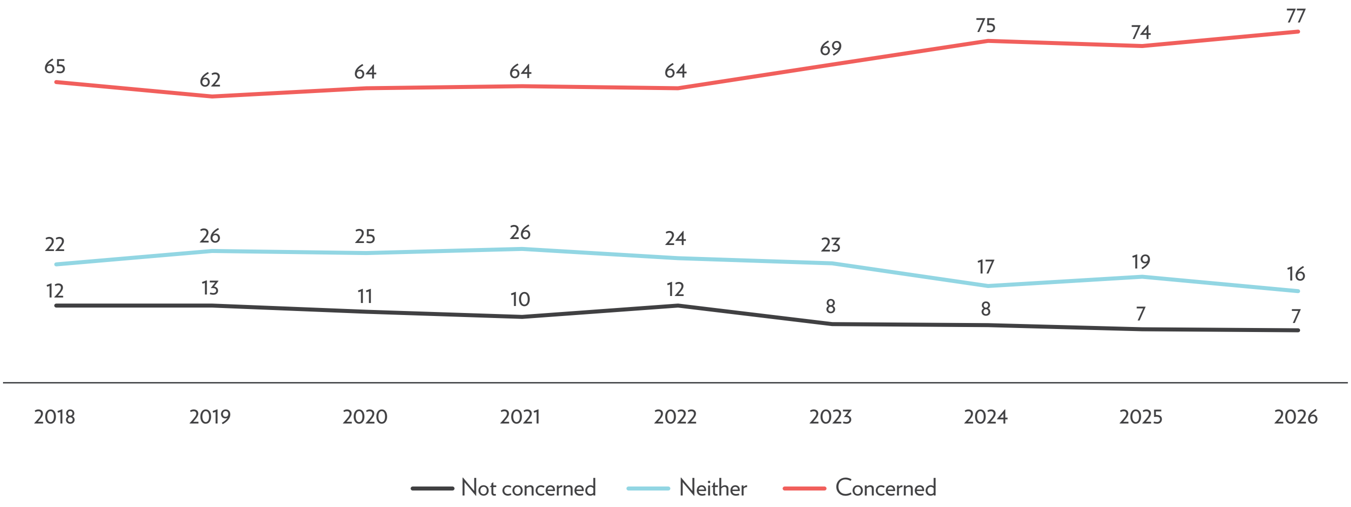


CONCERN ABOUT MISINFORMATION

Misinformation a growing concern for many Australians

Each year, we ask respondents whether they are concerned about what is real or fake on the internet. Once again, Australians are more likely to say they are concerned about misinformation online than in previous years. Seventy-seven percent of Australians now say they are concerned about online misinformation, and this is a three percentage point increase since 2025 (see **figure 7.28**).

Figure 7.28: Concern about misinformation online 2018 – 2026 (%)



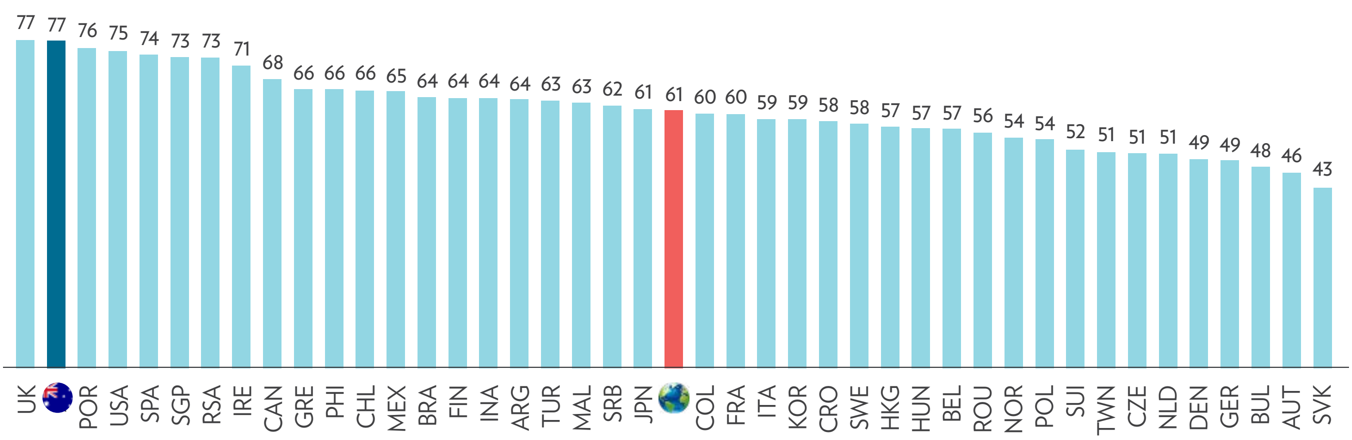
[Q_FAKE_NEWS_1] Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. "Thinking about online news, I am concerned about what is real and what is fake on the internet." [Base: *n* = 2,025]

Australians are still among the most concerned in the world about online misinformation. However, this year we are joined by the UK (77%) with both being 16 percentage points above the global average (61%) (see **figure 7.29**).

Concern about misinformation

77% 61%

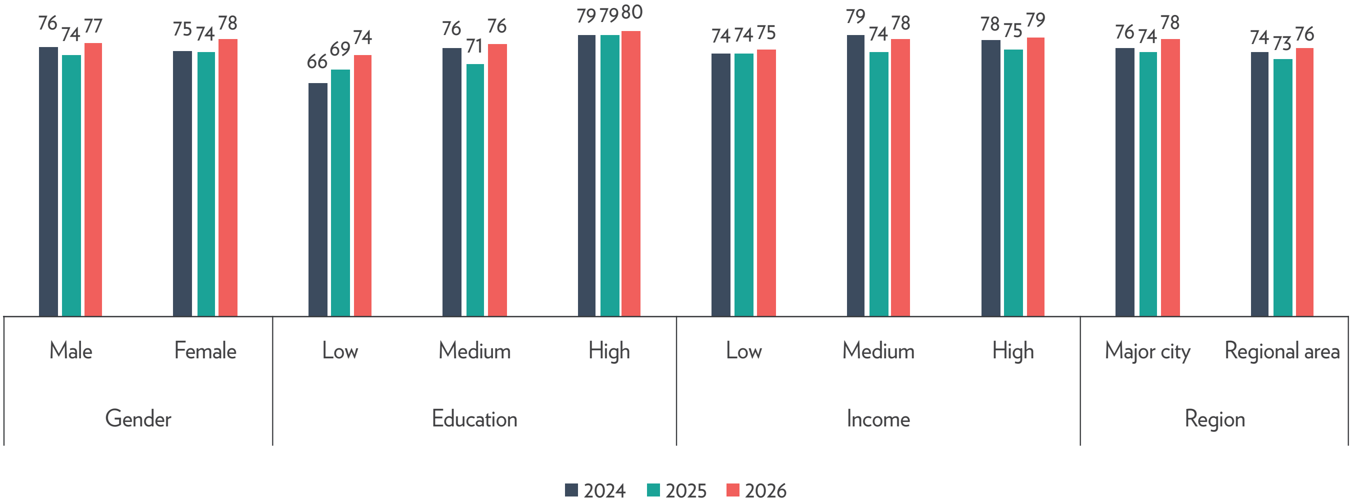
Figure 7.29: Concern about misinformation online by country (%)



[Base: *n* = 85,394]

Over the past three years, concern about what is real or fake on the internet has increased the most among women (78%, +3 since 2024) and those with low education (74%, +8 since 2024). However, these increases have largely brought women and low education groups in line with other demographics (see **figure 7.30**).

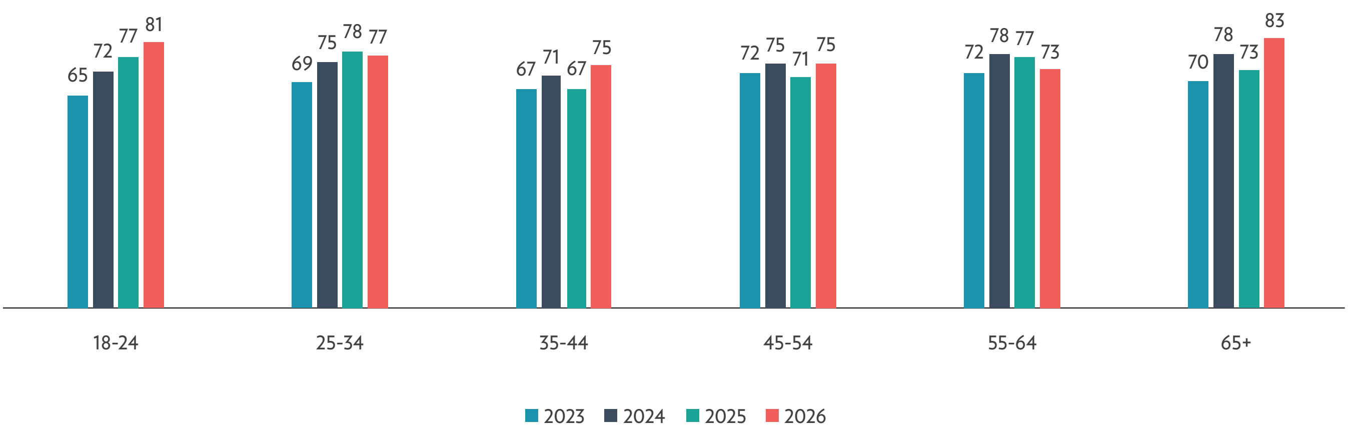
Figure 7.30: Concern about misinformation online by demographics (%)



18-24s and 65+ are the most concerned about misinformation

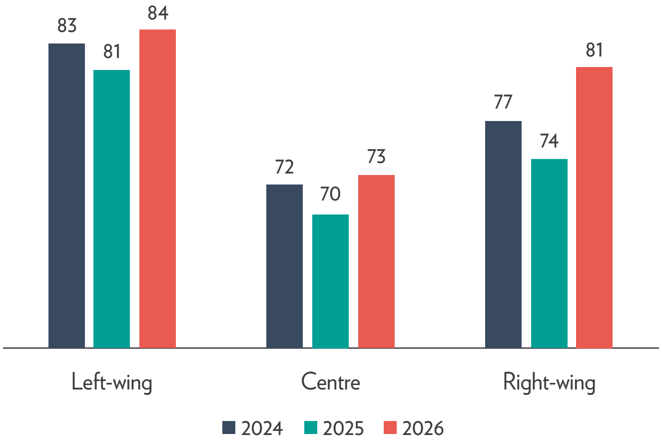
Almost all age groups are equally concerned about online misinformation, but in recent years younger audiences have increased to come in line with older. From 2023 to 2026, 18-24-year-olds increased in concern from 65% to 81% (+16), with 25-34-year-olds (+8) and 35-44-year-olds (+8) also seeing large increases (see **figure 7.31**).

Figure 7.31: Concern about misinformation online by age (%)



Left-wing respondents are generally more concerned about what is real or fake on the internet, compared to centre and right-wing respondents. However, in the past year, those who are right-wing saw a steep increase in levels of concern (81%, +7), bringing them closer to left-wing (84%) respondents in levels of concern (see **figure 7.32**).

Figure 7.32: Concern about misinformation online by political orientation (%)



SUMMARY

Rising cost of living, global conflicts and ongoing concerns such as false information online, climate change and the housing crisis are causes of stress for many Australians. As we found most acutely during the Covid-19 pandemic, in moments of uncertainty Australians turn to trusted sources of news to make sense of things and help them chart a course. This year could be considered such a moment of crisis.

This survey went into the field in January, in the wake of Australia's worst mass shooting since 1996 - the Bondi Beach shooting. As such, our high levels of concern about misinformation and scepticism towards news on social media and from AI chatbots seem understandable. Other studies have also suggested that trust in our political leadership may be on the slide, with the broad sentiment being that social cohesion is at risk.[1]

Interestingly, the data suggest that this increase in trust in *my news* can most likely be explained by rising trust among under 35s. This year, there was an increase in news consumption among younger generations. They are also increasingly turning to trusted news brands including public service media. This indicates that young people are not entirely uninterested in news. Rather, young people may be less habitual in their consumption patterns and turn to news in moments they really feel they need to know about ongoing events.

The trust bump in brands and *my news* this year likely reflects young people switching on to traditional news sources to help them make sense of global and domestic conflict and unrest. This is partly supported by the fact that, while under 35s may trust social media more than older generations, they still trust the news they choose to consume as well as public service media.

Important data from this year's survey reinforce the basic fact that quality drives trust. When audiences perceive news organisations as providing poor quality coverage, their levels of distrust are disproportionately higher. Furthermore, when public broadcasters are seen to be acting in society's best interest, this is associated with higher trust in news generally.

Quality is associated with trust, and trust is associated with active news consumption. This relatively simple principle is essential for the future of news in uncertain times.

[1] https://scanloninstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/SI0001_MappingSocialCohesion_2025_v5.pdf

COMMENTARY

AUDIENCES TRUST JOURNALISTS WHO LIVE AND WORK IN THE COMMUNITIES

Claire Stuchbery, Executive Director, Local & Independent News Association

In last year's *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, I wrote that newsrooms must find ways to meet audiences where they're at. If young people are increasingly accessing news and information on social media or through AI chatbots, then we must find a way to be present for them in these ecosystems. If some people are avoiding news, then we should seek to understand why, and find ways to provide them with the information that they need. This year's report indicates some improvements on that front. In particular, young people are turning to trusted news sources in increased numbers, and their overall distrust of news has plummeted, down 12 percentage points in two years.

Regional or local news brands as a general group are trusted by the majority of Australians, behind only the public broadcasters. They had the lowest unfavourability overall, being in an even better position than the ABC, SBS and the BBC. These results reinforce what we've always known at LINA: audiences value localism, and they value independently-produced public interest journalism.

The Edelman Trust Barometer shows that people tend to trust 'people like us' over experts and academics[1] – the more relatable the source, the more receptive we are to their message. Developing an authentic relationship with an audience is as true for the television news anchor as it is for social media influencers.

And there is no better representative of the 'person like us' than the local journalist. News produced by journalists who are part of the communities they serve generates a higher level of trust through increased relevance, through being informed by local knowledge, and through direct accountability.

Journalists who live and work in the communities they cover are visible and approachable in a way that those who drop in only occasionally are not.

They have an inside track on the nuances of community structures and often report with a little more care and consideration knowing they may have to defend their verification processes in the checkout queue. Local reporters are part of the community through thick and thin. We see this particularly during disaster coverage, when for a brief moment it seems like all of Australia's media attention shifts to one town, or to one region. Though they provide essential reporting during the emergency itself, once the fires have been put out or the floodwaters have receded, national media tend to leave as quickly as they came.

It is local media that remains to cover when roads have re-opened, what support is available, to report on stories of heroism and loss and to contribute to the slow reknitting of the social fabric after an intense disruption. They are embedded in community resilience and rebuild.

Local and independent media also build trust with their communities by taking a direct role in combatting mis- and disinformation.

They are well-placed to identify emerging false narratives in their communities and to ask relevant questions to find information that helps people distinguish between what is real and what is fake.

This role was highlighted in the Senate's recent report on restoring trust in the climate and energy debate, which profiled the *Illawarra Flame*'s investigation into reports circulating locally that offshore wind farms are dangerous to whales – a claim that the *Flame* found to be false.[2]

The overall picture is improving but it's not universally rosy. In particular, the steady growth of people accessing news through social media and AI chatbots sits in parallel to these being the least trusted information services for all age groups.

We also still have a problem of news avoidance in this country, though this report links it strongly to distrust in news. The Next Gen News report shows that young people will engage with news that is useful to them.[3] At LINA we think about news that serves both individuals and communities. Demonstrating to more Australians that our work is useful and reliable is a pathway to addressing news avoidance.

For publishers, this means investing in trust through reliable reporting that serves the day-to-day information needs of their audience and by being visible and accountable in their communities.

Increasingly, newsmakers are required to show their work and explain their processes to take audiences on a journey to trust and differentiate fact-based reporting from opinion or other content formats. Policymakers too must recognise the importance of local and independent journalism not only as a commercial activity, but as civic infrastructure essential for social health and in need of support to achieve public good outcomes.

The *Digital News Report: Australia 2026* shows that audiences are ready to trust publishers that meet them where they are with the information that they need. The next step is to build this finding into a strong, sustainable news sector.

[1]Edelman Trust Barometer 2024. https://www.edelman.com/trust/2024/trust-barometer

[2]Senate. 2026. P. 107. https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/RB000675/toc_pdf/TheIntegrityGapRestoringTrustintheClimateandEnergyDebate.pdf

[3]https://www.next-gen-news.com/

COMMENTARY

CRITICAL TRUST IN NEWS IS THE FOUNDATION OF DEMOCRACY

Tom Mooney, Campaign Director - Democracy Counts, McKinnon

In the complex and rapidly changing news and information landscape of 2026, Australia remains a relative beacon of democratic stability. As the findings in this report attest, compared to international counterparts, Australians maintain above-average levels of trust in both the news as a whole and the specific outlets they consume. This aligns with Australians' general confidence in the democratic foundations of Australia as a whole – the Democracy Counts campaign found 66% of Australians think our democratic system is working well or needs some reform but is fundamentally sound. But the strength of our democracy cannot be taken for granted, and this year's *Digital News Report: Australia* also provides some sobering findings.

A functioning democracy needs informed citizens, and when people don't trust media (or politics), they tune out.

Among Australians who trust the news, 57% still occasionally avoid it – a concerning enough figure in an era of "news fatigue". However, for those who distrust the news, that figure jumps to a staggering 80%. What follows is a dangerous and self-fulfilling cycle – distrust in news leads to political disengagement, political disengagement leads to governments not being sufficiently held accountable to their citizens, which in turn leads to behaviour not worthy of trust in institutions.

But there is hope. People are more likely to engage when they feel the information they receive is of high-quality and relevant to their lives. This is supported by this year's findings: 61% of respondents trust their local or regional newspapers, significantly higher than the 46% who trust national or metro tabloids. Regional newsrooms are often the last line of defense against the "news deserts" that breed misinformation and civic alienation. But many have closed in recent years or are under significant financial stress. In Australia we accept that there are many essential public services that the user is not able or willing to pay for, but which must be supported and maintained all the same.

Public interest journalism, in this regard, is no different from roads, healthcare, or public education.

That is why the Democracy Counts campaign is partnering with organisations like the Local and Independent News Association and Community Broadcaster's Association of Australia to advocate for the policy settings and government support that will keep local newsrooms sustainable and encourage a diverse range of independent news sources. We are also partnering with groups like Digital Rights Watch to highlight the need for tech giants to be transparent about their algorithms and accountable for combatting misinformation on their platforms.

Of course, trust in media must be earned, and perhaps the only outcome worse than the complete and utter disintegration of trust is a citizenry that has blind faith in any media they consume.

Citizens need "critical trust" in their news sources – reliable, unbiased reporting that provides the shared, basic understanding of facts necessary to participate in civic life, mixed with the ability to tell fact from fiction and understand the role of vested interests.

These two qualities are actually mutually-reinforcing. Last year's data proved that trust is notably higher among those who understand how the "sausage is made" – that is, how news is produced, fact-checked, and edited. That is part of the reason we need a renewed national investment in media literacy and civics education. This isn't just about spotting fake news; it's about teaching the critical ability to navigate our political and information ecosystems.

Democracy requires trust and a common language of facts. The Democracy Counts campaign is pushing for reforms to ensure every Australian has a voice that is heard and information sources they can rely on. As the findings of this year's *Digital News Report: Australia* attest, the foundations are sound but our news media system needs to work to continue to earn the trust democracy requires.

Find out more about the Democracy Counts campaign at www.democracycounts.org.au

NEWS MOMENTS

9 December 2025 | Victoria formally apologises to First Peoples of the state of Victoria. The apology followed the passing of legislation in the Victorian Parliament on 16 October 2025 which established a treaty between Victoria and the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. The legislation establishes a permanent democratically elected representative body for First Peoples' in Victoria that will provide advice to and negotiate with the Victorian Government.

Image by CON CHRONIS / AAP Image

8 PAYING FOR NEWS

- Payment for online news has remained stable (23%, +1).
- Young people are increasingly paying for news (41% of 25-34, +7).
- Australia has the highest proportion of people paying for digital-only news brands (35%) globally.
- The top reasons for paying for news are to get exclusive content (46%) and an ad-free experience (39%).
- U35s (30%) are twice as likely than 35+ (15%) to pay for news to make sure news content is available free of charge to others.

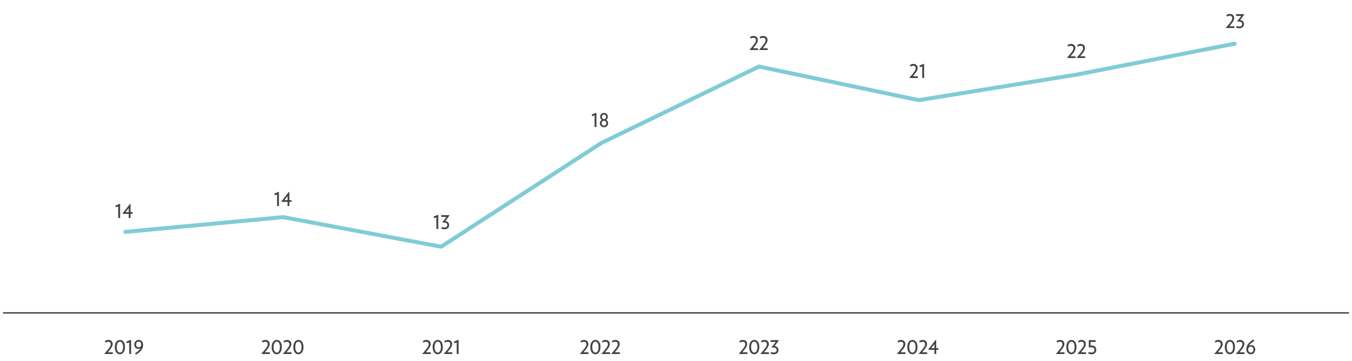
PAYING FOR NEWS

Online news payment remains stagnant

Online news payment has stalled in recent years. In Australia, the proportion who pay for news remains at 23% (+1) (see **figure 8.1**).

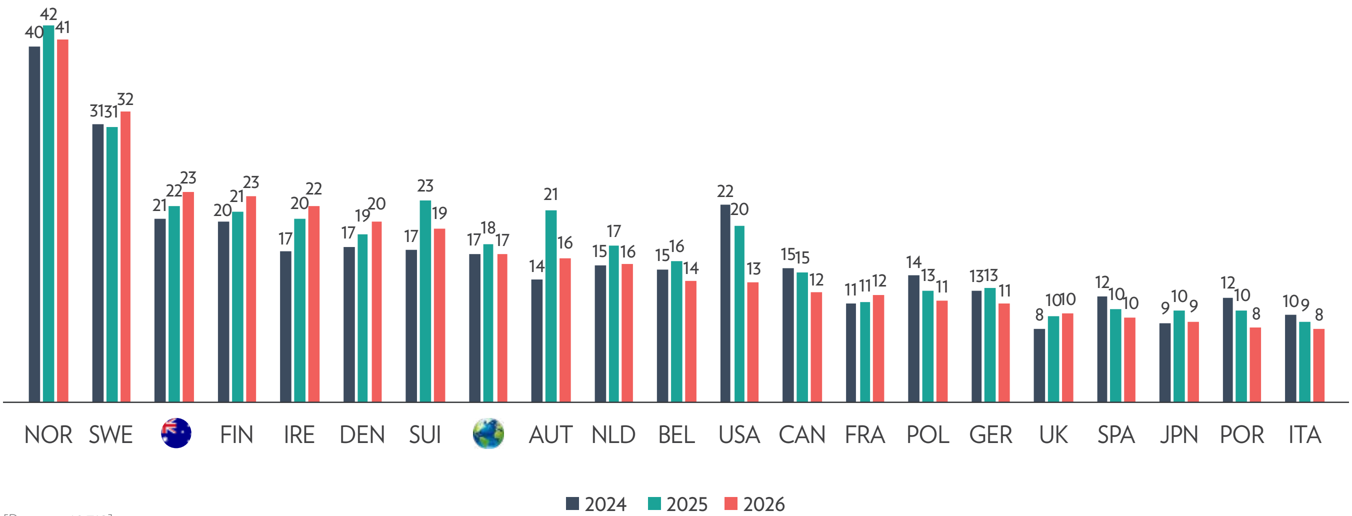
Globally, news payment seems to have hit a ceiling, most likely in response to the cost-of-living crisis. On average, only 17% (-1) are paying for online news. Australians are among the most likely to pay in the world, after Norway (41%, -1) and Sweden (32%, +1). There was a notable drop in the proportion of news consumers paying for online news in the U.S. (-7), where only 13% are paying (see **figure 8.2**).

Figure 8.1: Paying for online news 2019 – 2026 (%)



[Q7a.] Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service in the last year? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription or one-off payment for an article or app or e-edition) [Base *n* = 2,010 (2019), 2,131 (2020), 2,034 (2021), 2,038 (2022), 2,003 (2024), 2,006 (2025), 2,025 (2026)]

Figure 8.2: Paying for online news by select countries 2024 – 2026 (%)

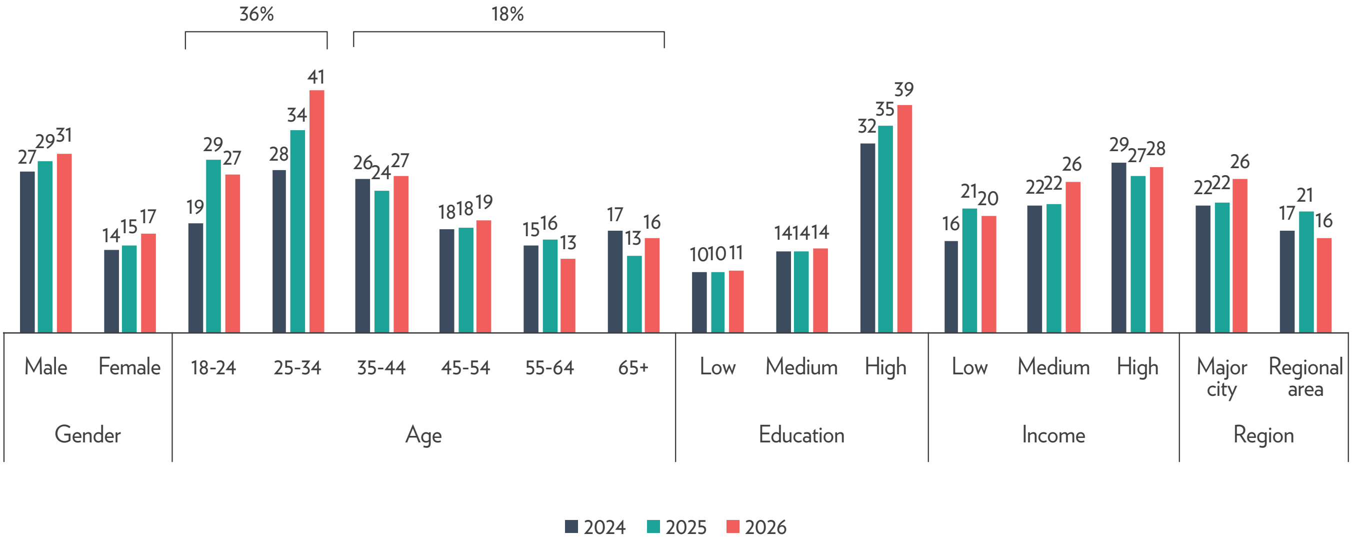


[Base *n* = 40,712]

Younger audiences and those with high education are increasingly paying for news

The number of those aged 25-34 who pay for news has grown (41%, +7). Payment among those with high education has also increased (39%, +4). In contrast, there was a decrease among regional consumers (16%, -5). As in previous years, men, younger audiences, those with high income and education, and city dwellers are more likely to pay for news (see **figure 8.3**).

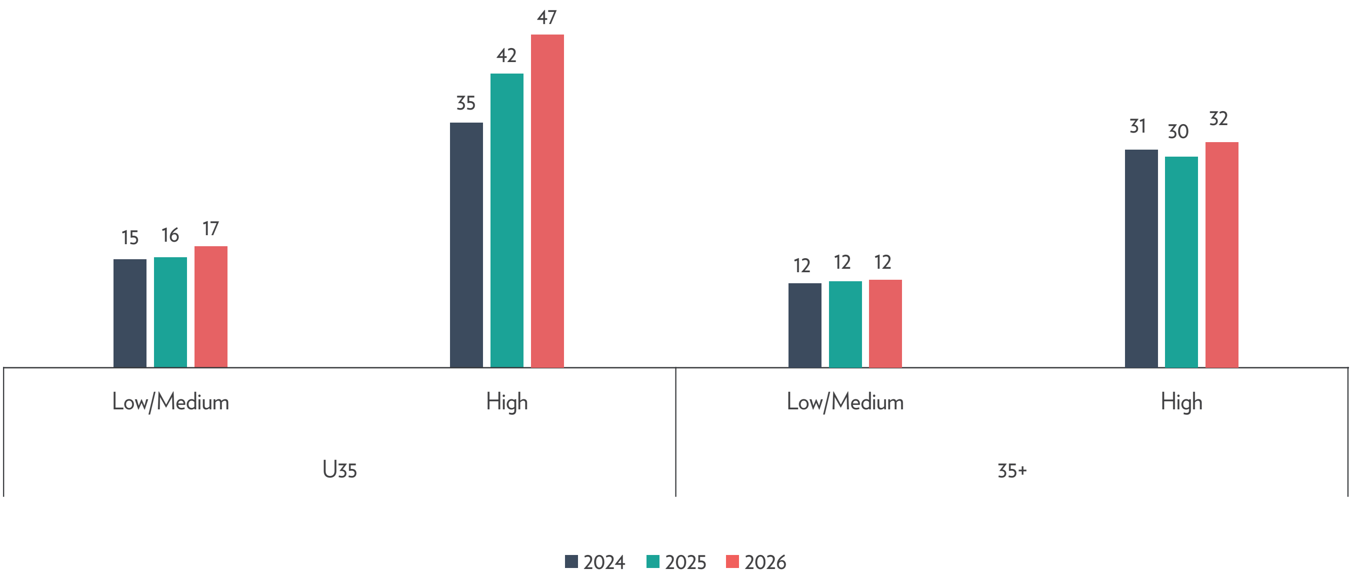
Figure 8.3: Paying for online news by demographics 2024 – 2026 (%)



Highly educated young consumers are the most likely to pay

Figure 8.4 shows clear differences across age and education levels. Among under 35s, those with high education (47%) are much more likely to pay than those with low or medium education (17%). The proportion of those under 35s with high education who pay for news has been increasing year on year. For people aged 35 and over, the numbers remain similar, regardless of their education level.

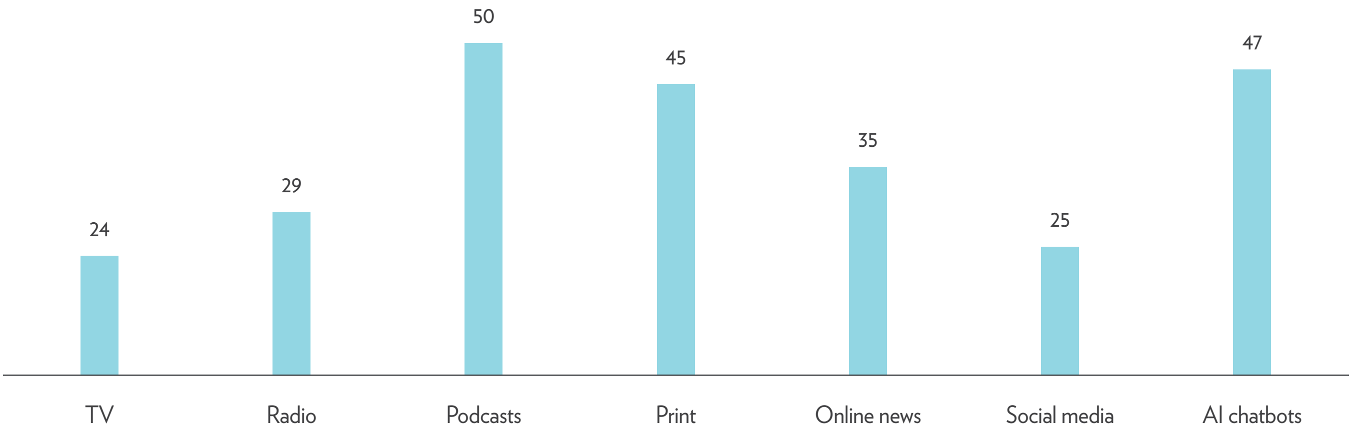
Figure 8.4: Paying for online news by age and education 2024 – 2026 (%)



Podcast listeners are the most likely to pay for news

Respondents who access news via podcasts (50%) are much more likely to pay for news than other news users. While still a small number of people, AI chatbot news users are also more likely to pay for news (47%) than other news users. TV and social media users are the least likely to pay for news (see **figure 8.5**).

Figure 8.5: Paying for online news by general source of news (%)



Those who seek news from influencers are more likely to pay for online news

Those who get news from creators or influencers are more likely to pay for news than those who do not access news from these sources. The trend is similar between those who access news from news influencers (38%), and those who access news from creators whose focus is on other topics but sometimes talk about news (39%). This possibly means that those who access news via creators are more active news consumers who want extra context and in-depth coverage of news as well as from paid news content (see **figure 8.6**).

As with previous years, trust is a strong predictor of online news payment. Those who say they trust news (30%) and those who trust news they choose to consume (30%) are much more likely to pay for news than distrusters (see **figure 8.7**).

Figure 8.6: Paying for online news by creators as a source of news (%)

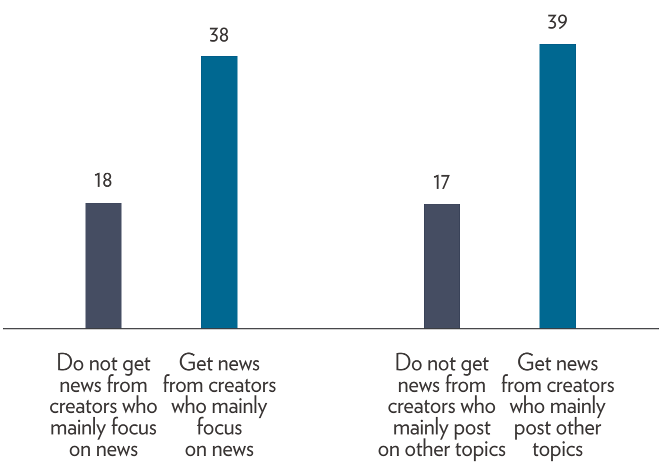
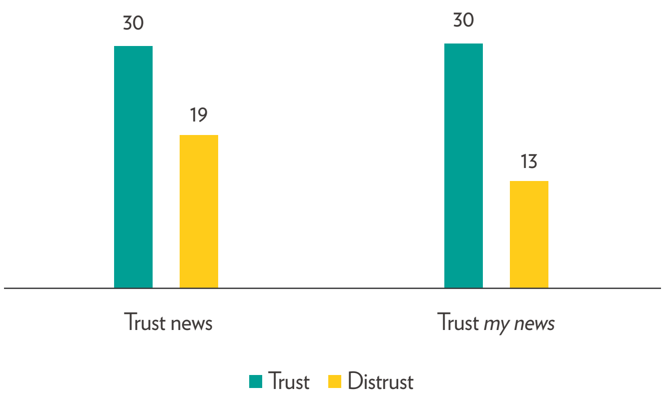


Figure 8.7: Paying for online news by trust in news and trust *my news* (%)



People who prefer news to have their viewpoint are more likely to pay for news

Those who prefer to get news from sources that share their point of view are the most likely to pay for news (38%) than those who prefer news that challenges their viewpoint (32%) or prefer news to be neutral (20%) (see **figure 8.8**). This is in line with the fact that those who are highly educated and left-leaning also tend to prefer news that has a viewpoint (see **Chapter 1**).

Those who believe that news on public service media has a positive effect on life in Australia are more likely to pay for news (31%) than those who believe it has a negative impact (20%) or those who do not have a particular view (14%) (see **figure 8.9**).

Figure 8.8: Paying for online news by preference for point of view in news (%)

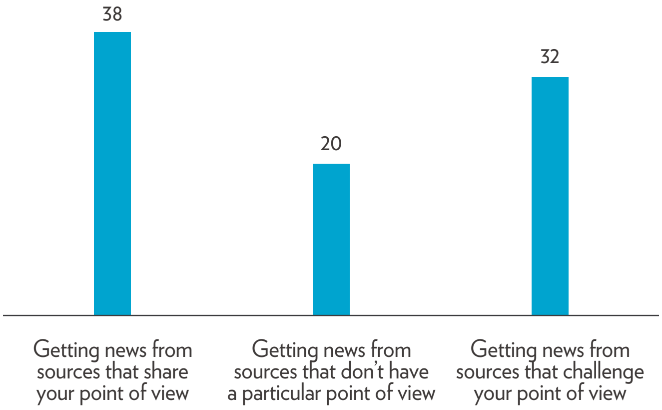
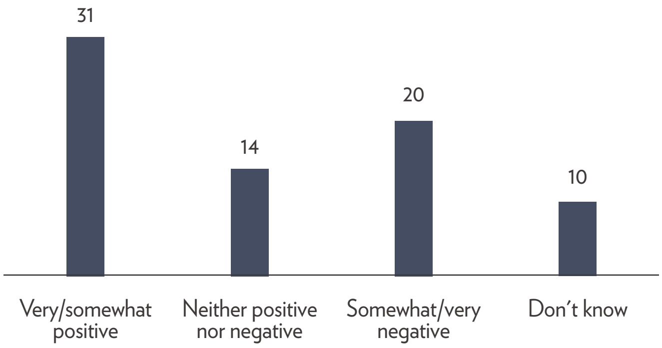


Figure 8.9: Paying for online news by value of public service media (%)

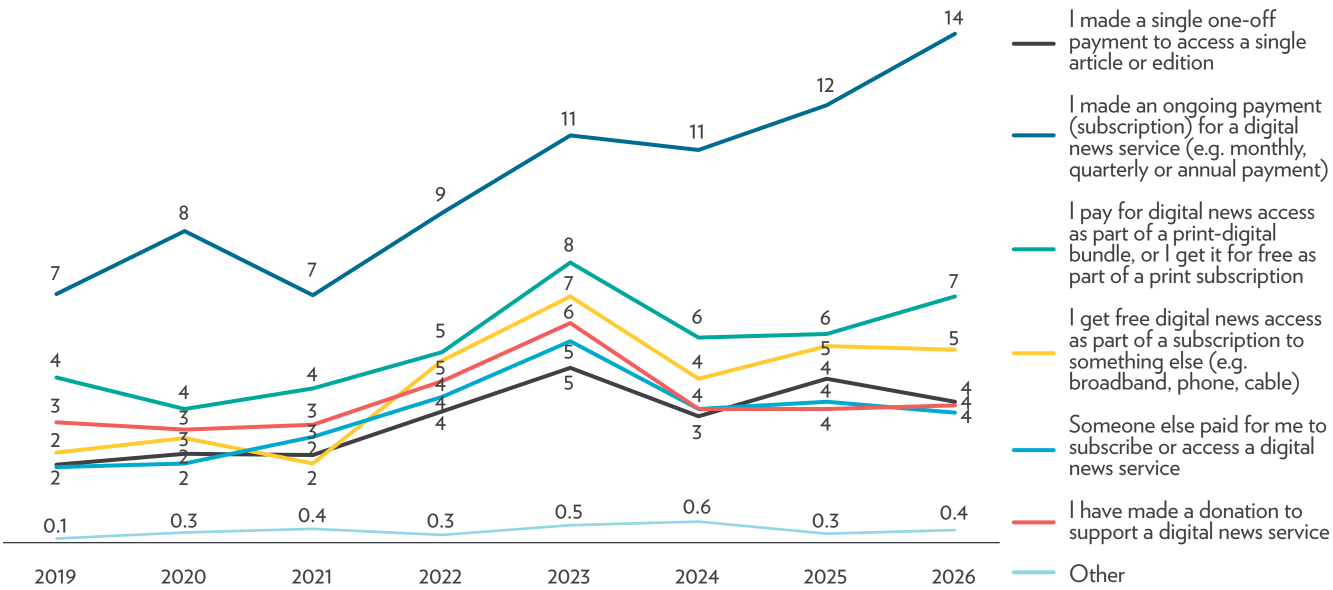


Ongoing subscriptions are still growing

While overall levels of pay remain stagnant, the number of people who subscribe to online news through a subscription has grown over time (14%), and this has doubled since 2019.

People are getting used to subscribing to news. All other types of payment remained roughly at the same level as last year (see **figure 8.10**).

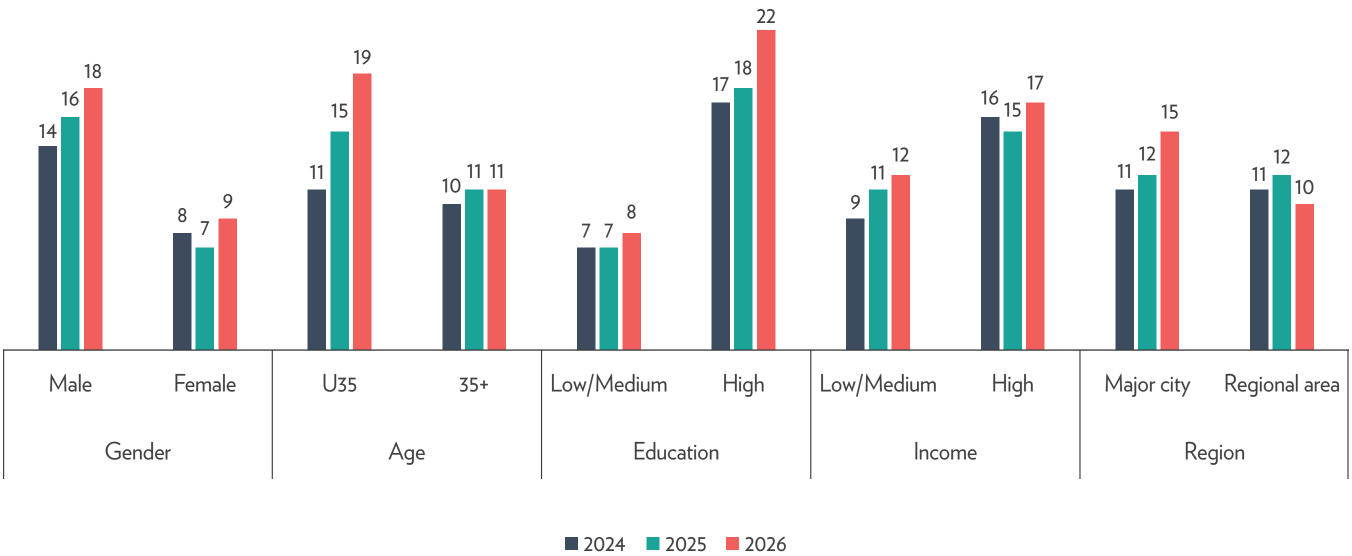
Figure 8.10: Payment type 2019 – 2026 (%)



[Q7ai] You said you have accessed paid for ONLINE news content in the last year... Which, if any, of the following ways have you used to pay for ONLINE news content in the last year? Please select all that apply. [Base: n = 474]

Ongoing payment for news has increased since 2024 among men (18% vs. 14%), people under 35 (19% vs. 11%), highly educated (22% vs. 17%), low- or medium-income earners (12% vs. 9%), and city dwellers (15% vs. 11%), compared to others in the past two years. The gaps between many of these demographics are widening (see **figure 8.11**).

Figure 8.11: Ongoing payment for digital news service by demographics 2024 – 2026 (%)



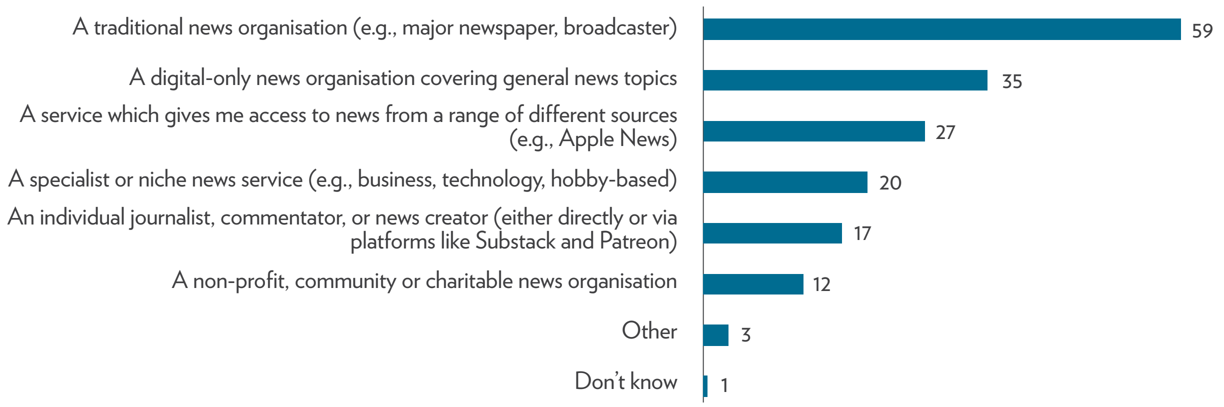
TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS FOR PAID NEWS

Traditional news organisations have the largest share of news payers

We asked the 427 respondents who paid for news in the past year what types of organisations they paid to. The top response was traditional news organisations such as newspapers (59%), followed by digital-only news organisations that cover general news topics (35%).

Less than one-third (27%) are paying for aggregated services such as Apple News, and one in five (20%) pay for a niche or specialist news service. A similar number of respondents (17%) are paying for individual journalists or creators (see **figure 8.12**).

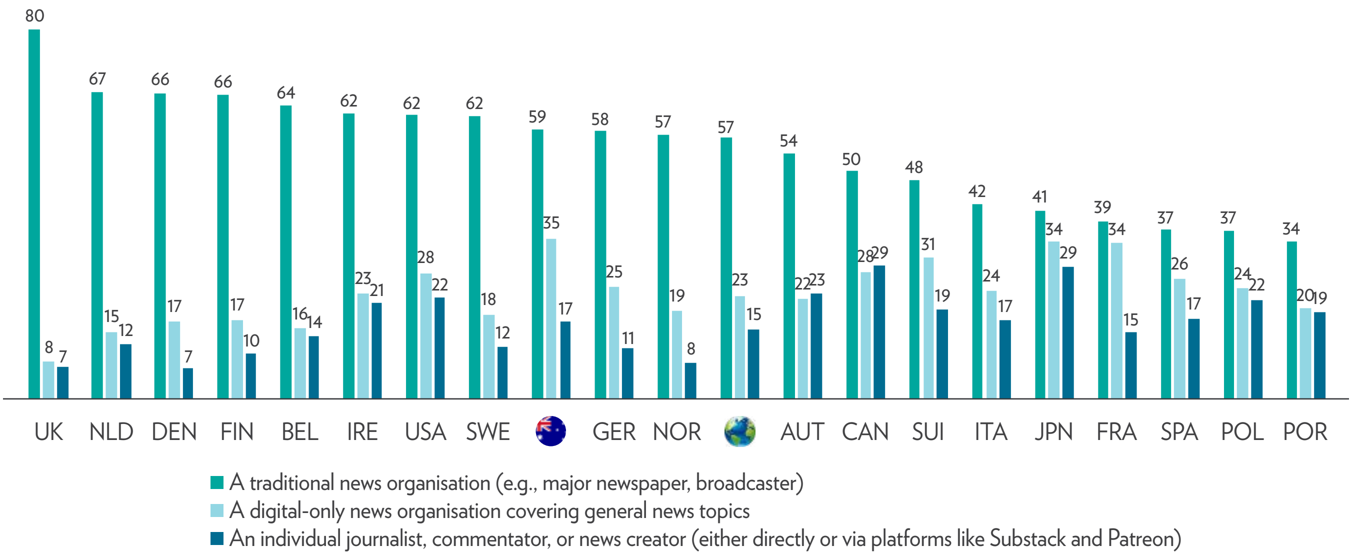
Figure 8.12: Types of news organisations for paid news (%)



[Q7_2026_type] You said that you have paid for access to online news in the last year… Which of the following types of news organisations or individuals have you paid money to? Please select all that apply. [Base: *n* = 427]

Payment types vary considerably in different countries. In the UK, 80% of news payers pay for traditional news, and only 8% pay for digital-only news that cover general news topics. However, in Japan, 41% pay for traditional news, and 34% pay for digital-only news. Australia is very similar to the global average in paying for traditional news outlets (59% vs. 57%). However, there is a substantial difference between Australia (35%) and the global average (23%) when it comes to paying for digital-only news brands; Australia has the highest number globally (see **figure 8.13**).

Figure 8.13: Types of news organisations for paid news by country (%)

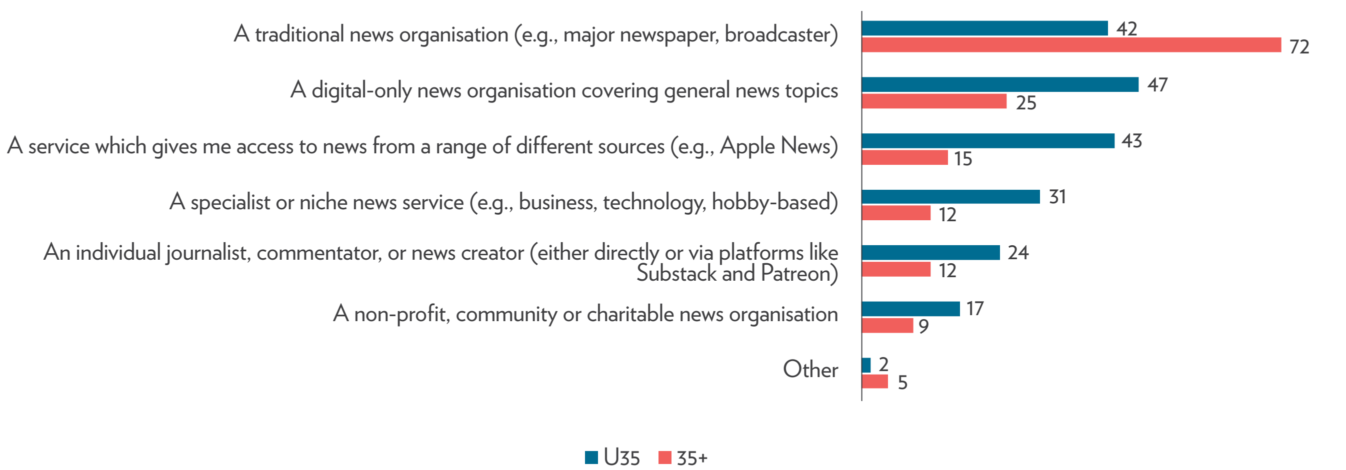


[Base: *n* = 5,669]

Younger generations are more likely to pay for digital-only publications than traditional news

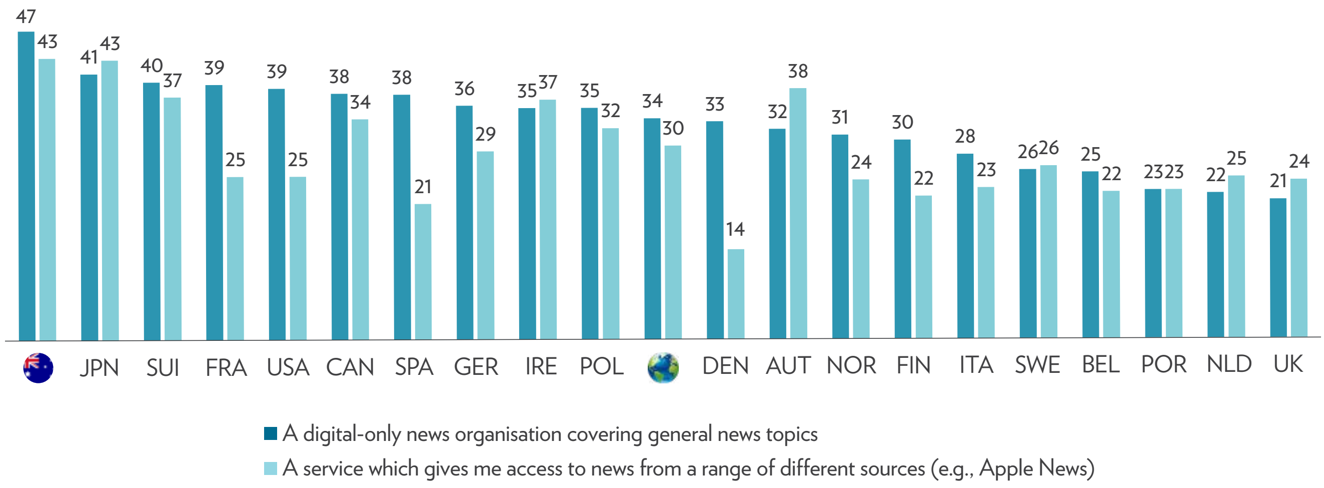
The top type of payment among U35s is digital-only news organisations that cover general news, indicating their preference for non-mainstream news. In contrast, among those 35+, 72% are paying for traditional news. U35s are also much more likely than 35+ to pay for aggregated services, a specialist publication, individual journalists and influencers, as well as to donate to not-for-profit news organisations (see **figure 8.14**).

Figure 8.14: Types of news organisations for paid news by age (%)



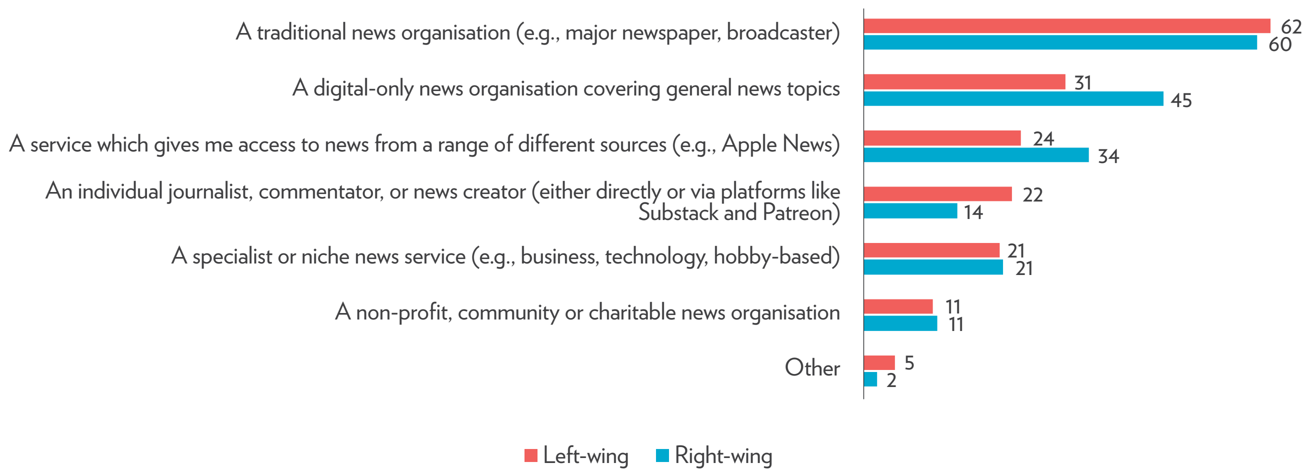
Australia has the highest proportion of new payers among U35 paying for digital-only publications (47%) and aggregated news services (43%). This shows the highly digitalised news habits among young Australians (see **figure 8.15**).

Figure 8.15: Types of news organisations for paid news among U35s by news access (%)



Right-leaning consumers (45%) are much more likely to pay for digital-only news services than left-leaning consumers (31%). However, left-wing consumers (22%) are more likely to pay for individual journalists or creators compared to right-wing consumers (14%) (see **figure 8.16**).

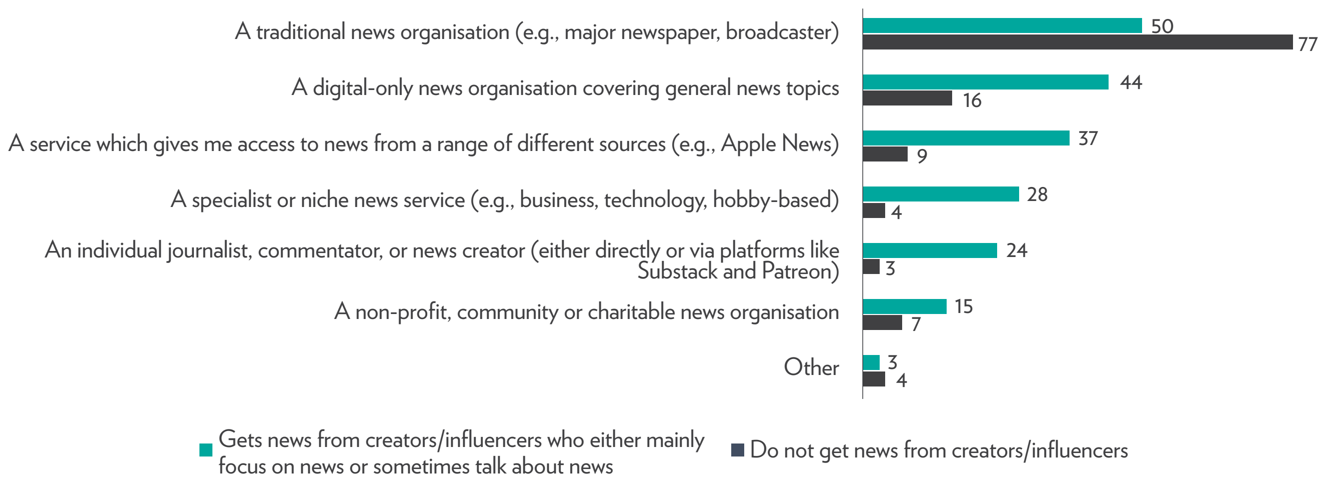
Figure 8.16: Types of news organisations for paid news by political orientation (%)



People who get news from influencers seek a diverse range of paid options

Among those who pay for news, those who say they access news from news creators and influencers are less likely to pay for traditional news organisations (50%) than those who don't access news from them (77%). On the other hand, they are more than twice as likely to pay to get access to digital-only news publications (44%), than those who don't get news from creators and influencers (16%). They are also much more likely to pay for individual journalists directly (24%) than those who don't access news from creators and influencers (3%). It seems that those who access news from creators and influencers are seeking a range of different news sources, as they are also much more likely to say they pay for aggregated news (37% vs 9%) (see **figure 8.17**).

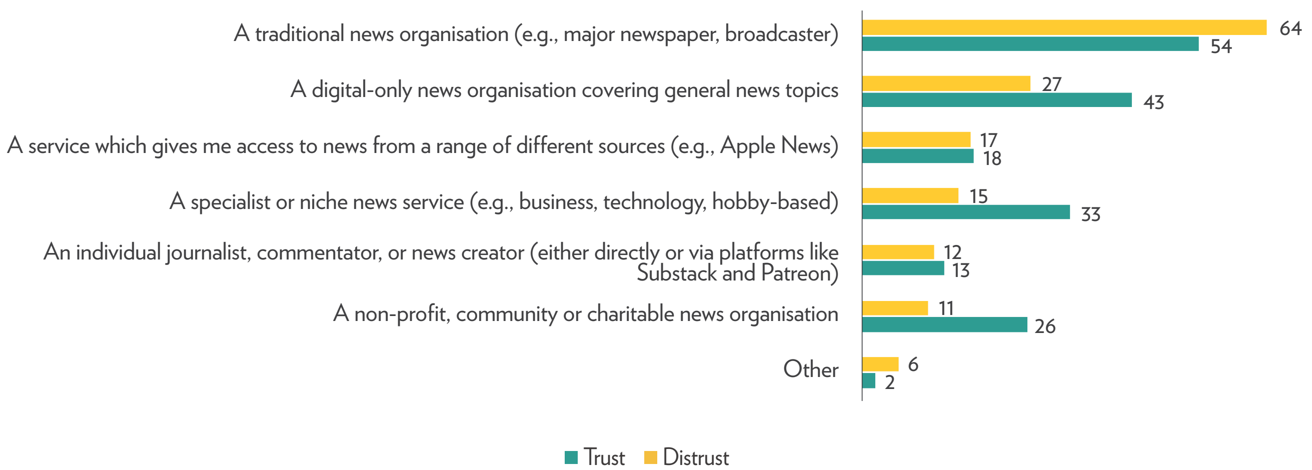
Figure 8.17: Types of news organisations for paid news by those who get news from creators (%)



Trust seems to be related to the types of organisations people pay to get news. Those with low trust (64%) are more likely to pay for traditional news compared to those with high trust (54%). This means those who generally have low trust in the news environment are seeking news from news outlets.

Those who say they trust news in general tend to be digital-only news payers (43%) compared to distrusters (27%). Those who have trust in news are much more likely to subscribe to specialist publications (33%) than those with low trust (15%) (see **figure 8.18**).

Figure 8.18: Types of news organisations for paid news by trust in news (%)

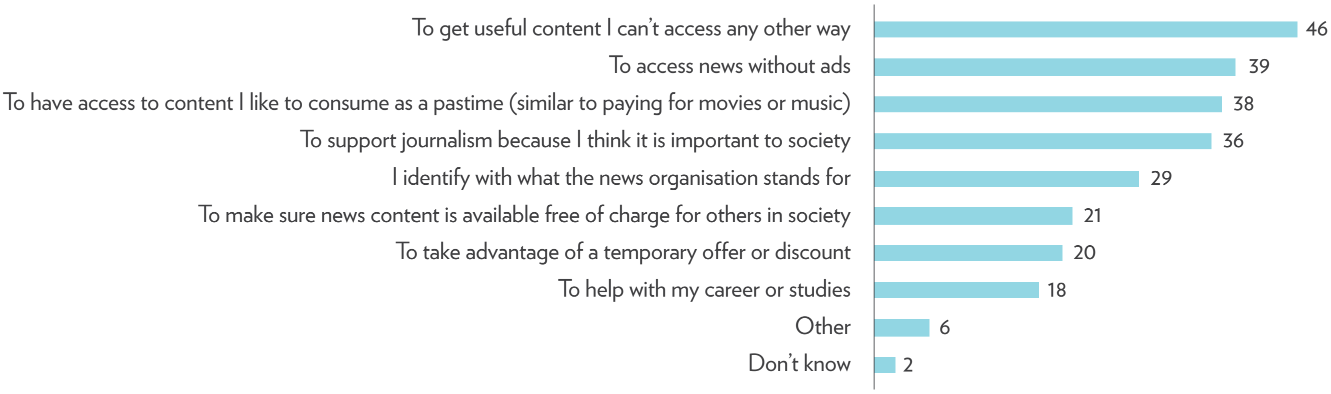


REASONS FOR PAYING

Getting unique content is the driver of pay

We asked those who say they paid for news in the last year why they pay for online news. The top reason was to get access to content that they can't get any other way (46%), followed by ad-free news (39%). Another 38% say they consider paying for news in a similar way to paying for movies or music and are paying for content to pass the time. Supporting journalism as a social good (36%) and paying for the values the organisation stands for (29%) also had relatively high responses. One in five had an altruistic motive – to make sure others can get access to good free content (21%) (see **figure 8.19**).

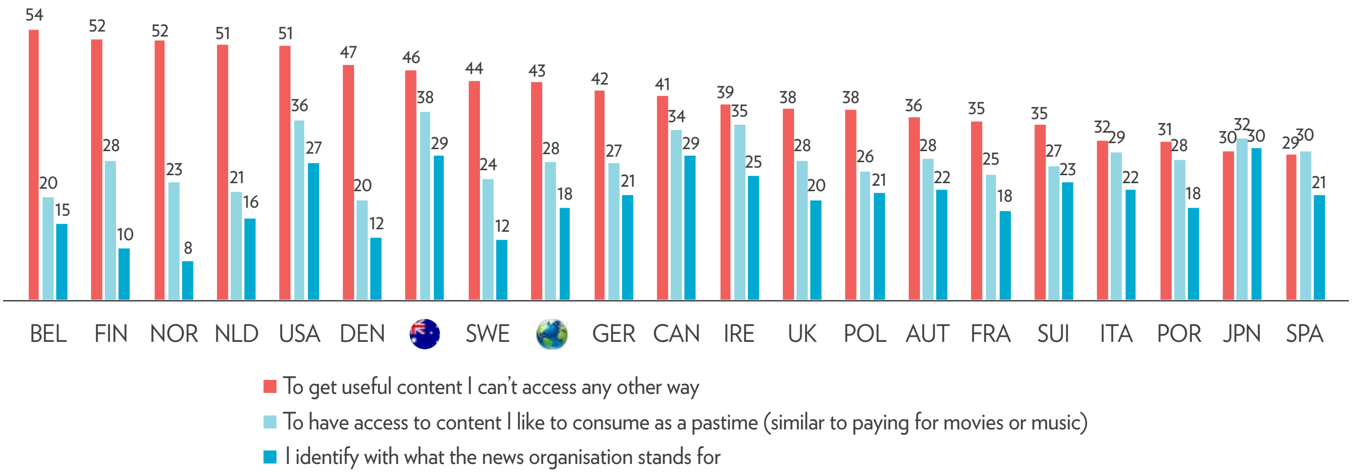
Figure 8.19: Reasons to pay for news (%)



[Q7_2026_motivation1] You said that you have paid for access to online news in the last year... Which of the following, if any, describes why you pay for online news? Please select all that apply. [Base: *n* = 427]

The reasons why people choose to pay for news differed considerably by country. The global average of paying for unique content is 43%. However, in countries such as Belgium (54%), Finland (52%) and Norway (52%), this proportion is signficantly higher than in other countries. This suggests that paid news services in these countries are regarded as providing unique, high-value content. In contrast, respondents in Spain (29%) and Japan (30%) have lower proportions of paying consumers paying for unique content. Instead, in these countries, they are more likely to say they pay for content to pass the time, similar to paying for movies or music, implying that paid news consumption is more of a habitual activity (see **figure 8.20**).

Figure 8.20: Reasons to pay for news by country (%)

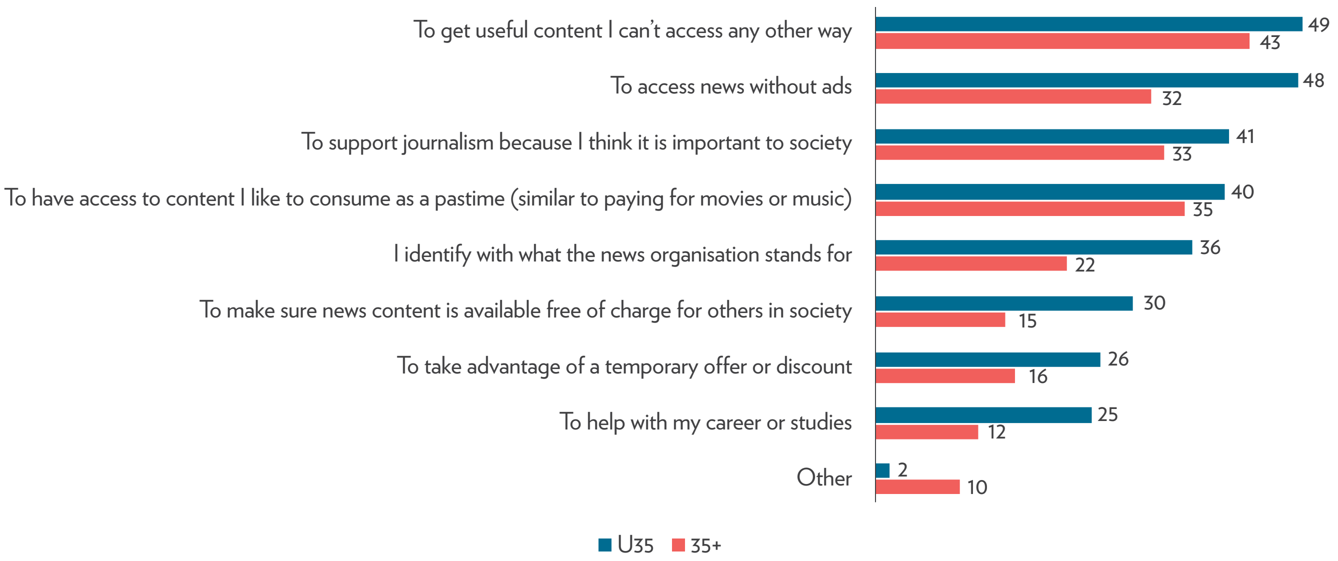


[Base *n* = 5,669]

Young people pay for news to benefit others

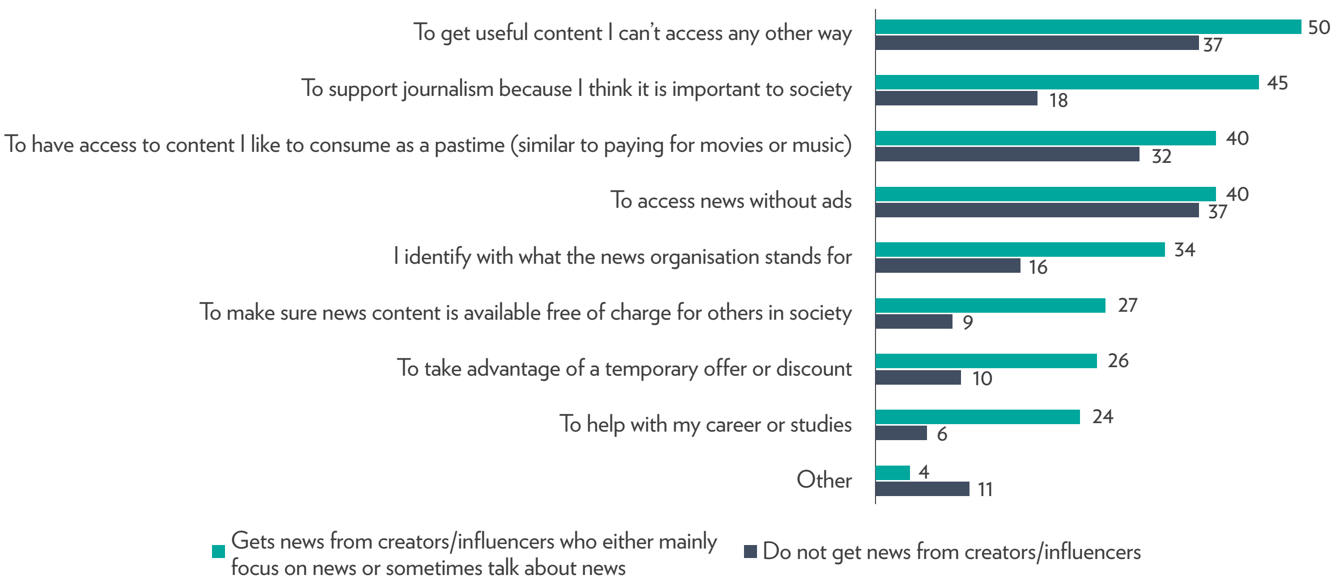
The reasons young people pay for news are slightly different to those of older generations. U35s pay to get unique content (49%) and ad-free news (48%). Those aged 35+ are less likely to pay for unique content (43%) and ad-free news (32%). Younger generations are much more likely to pay for news organisations that share a cause (36%) than those 35+ (22%). Younger people are more likely to see news as a social good (41%). U35s are twice as likely to pay for news to make sure news content is available free of charge for others compared to 35+ (30% vs. 15%) (see **figure 8.21**).

Figure 8.21: Reasons to pay for news by age (%)



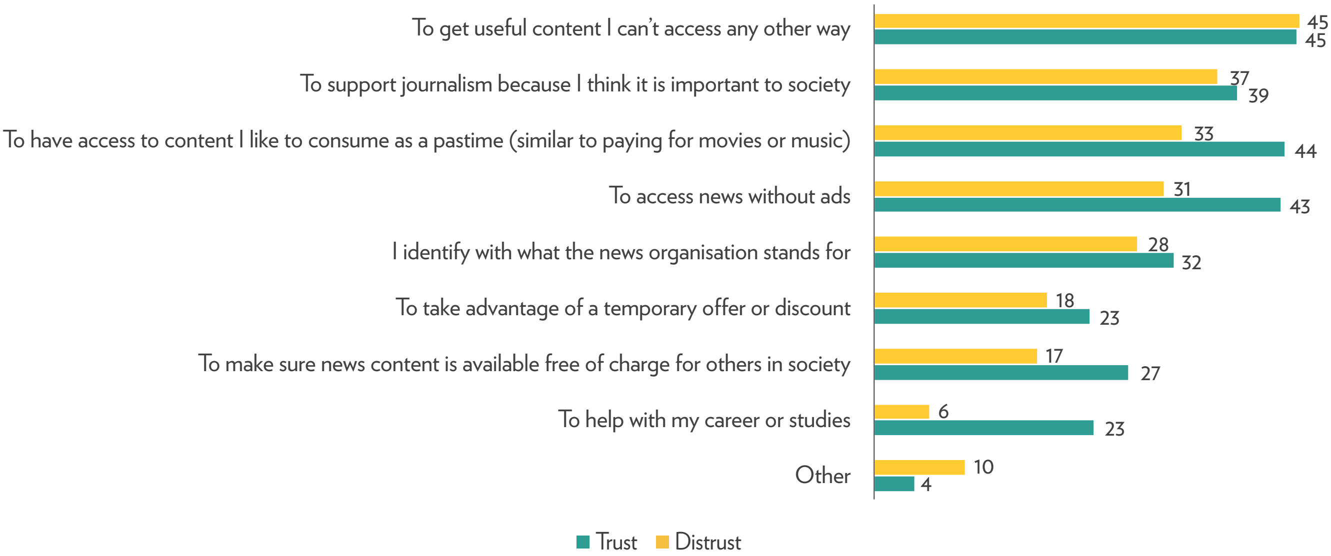
Those who access news from news creators and influencers are more likely to agree with all the reasons that were provided about reasons to pay for news. The biggest gap between those who access news from creators and influencers and those who do not was in their perception about supporting journalism due to its important role in society (45% vs. 18%), and because they identify with what news organisations stand for (34% vs. 16%) (see **figure 8.22**).

Figure 8.22: Reasons to pay for news by those who get news from creators (%)



Those who trust news in general are much more likely to pay for news so that news content is available for others in society (27%) compared to distrusters (17%). They are also more likely to pay for content to pass the time (44%), and to access news without ads (43%) (see **figure 8.23**).

Figure 8.23: Reasons to pay for news by trust in news (%)



SUMMARY

This year's data reveals that younger generations have different attitudes compared to older generations regarding paying for news, types of news they pay for, and their motivations for paying.

In the past three years, there was a significant growth in news payment among younger audiences. This has increased the most among highly educated consumers under 35.

While traditional newspapers and legacy brands remain the most common sources for paid content, younger and highly educated people are also willing to pay for digital-only news outlets. Australia has the highest proportion of paying news consumers in the world who subscribe to digital-only news outlets. Paying for news is particularly prominent among U35s, where almost half say they pay for a digital-only outlet.

In terms of motivations for paying, consumers are most likely to pay to access exclusive stories or avoid intrusive advertising. Many also see paying for news as a way of supporting journalism in general, as well as broader social causes. For many, news consumption equates to participating in society, and supporting a cause through payment is deemed important. Younger people view news as a social good. U35s are twice as likely to pay for news to make sure news content is available free of charge for others compared to 35+.

Trust remains one of the strongest predictors of a consumer's tendency to pay for news. However, those who have low trust in the overall news environment prefer to pay for traditional news.

Interestingly, individuals who follow influencers are significantly more likely to pay for news. These people are often more active news consumers who seek extra context, in-depth coverage, and a diverse range of sources, including from individual journalists. They are less likely to be wedded to one type of news or one news outlet.

COMMENTARY

THE FUTURE OF NEWS PAYMENT DRIVEN BY YOUNGER GENERATIONS

Jason Koutsoukis, Special Correspondent, *The Saturday Paper*

My first day as a professional journalist — February 1994, at *The Age* newspaper in Melbourne — began with a note of pessimism. The news business was changing, and the rivers of gold that had flowed so effortlessly around the printing presses since the 1850s, all those three-line classified ads for cars and jobs and houses, could no longer be relied upon to pay for the fun stuff that makes journalism the best career in the world: gathering the news.

You know, things like chartering a helicopter to help police look for a missing hiker, or buying a tank — yes, an actual army tank — to navigate some difficult terrain, as *Age* veteran Lindsay Murdoch once did on assignment in Afghanistan.

I was twenty-four years old back then and, even during those halcyon first career days, I had the feeling that each night I was going to sleep on a cliff face perched dangerously above the rocks of bankruptcy. The nagging anxiety that we're all going to wake up one morning to find that the news business is finally out of business has never really gone away.

The irony is that the classified rivers of gold didn't dry up.

They were simply rerouted. Seek took the jobs. REA Group and Domain took the real estate. Carsales took the cars. Seek's market capitalisation sits in the billions. REA Group is worth more than most of the media companies that once hosted its listings combined.

Newspaper classifieds were decoupled from journalism in a way that was simply not imaginable in 1994, when buying a car and reading the sports section arrived in the same broadsheet bundle. These days, when news media proprietors complain that the revenue model is broken, I find myself wanting to push back: it is not broken, it has been redistributed. The combined revenues of the platforms that ate the classifieds make a rather eloquent case that there is still more than enough money coming in to fund serious journalism, as long as the will to pursue it is there.

Which brings me to the 12th edition of the University of Canberra's *Digital News Report: Australia 2026*. Produced by the University of Canberra's News and Media Research Centre as part of a global survey coordinated by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University, it is an annual health check on the state of the news business that over the last ten years has become one of the most useful tools the industry has.

The global report is the world's largest international comparative survey of news consumption, drawing on the responses of tens of thousands of digital news users across dozens of countries, and the Australian edition translates that into something local newsrooms and policymakers can actually use. Governments, news organisations, and citizens now have an evidence base for making decisions about how to produce, consume, and regulate the news media.

This report has, year by year, made it harder for the industry to plead ignorance about what its audiences actually think and want. That is no small thing. The good news is that this report establishes, beyond doubt, that Australian consumers are convinced of the need to pay for news.

Nearly one in four paid for online news in the past year, a figure that has held steady even as the cost-of-living crisis has bitten, and even as comparable rates have fallen sharply elsewhere. In the United States, the proportion paying for online news dropped seven percentage points in a single year, down to just 13 per cent. Australia, by contrast, barely moved. That kind of resilience, in this kind of economic environment, is worth noticing. But what is perhaps most striking is not how many young Australians are paying, but why.

Younger people are twice as likely as older ones to say they pay so that news remains freely available to others who cannot afford it.

Thirty percent of under-35s cite this as a motivation, against 15 per cent of those aged 35 and over. This is not the behaviour of a generation that has checked out.

Australia also has a legitimate claim to being the world's most enthusiastic market for digital-only news, with 35 per cent of Australians who pay for news subscribing to digital-only outlets, the highest proportion globally and well above the international average of 23 per cent. Among under-35s, digital-only outlets are the most common type of news they pay for, ahead of traditional newspapers and broadcasters. New entrants, specialist publications, and independent journalists are finding paying audiences here in a way that is not matched in most comparable markets.

That is undeniably good news, but structural problems remain. Payment is skewed toward men, higher earners, the highly educated, and city dwellers. Regional consumers are moving in the wrong direction, with payment rates in that cohort falling six percentage points last year. A news industry financially dependent on educated urban professionals is one whose commercial incentives will tend to serve educated urban professionals, perhaps exacerbating feelings of neglect already fuelling resentment in rural and regional communities.

The reasons people give for paying are also worth noting. The top answer, cited by 46 per cent of respondents, is access to content they cannot get any other way. The second is an ad-free experience. These are personal convenience motivations, not civic ones, suggesting that mission-based appeals alone will not convert the undecided.

The trust factor is perhaps the most instructive.

People who trust news are more likely to pay for it. But among those who do pay, those with low trust gravitate toward traditional outlets, treating established titles and broadcasters as a credibility anchor in an environment they find unreliable.

The challenges are real, and the ground is still uneven. But the 30 per cent of young Australians who say they pay to keep news free for others have worked out that news matters. Readers, it turns out, are getting there in the end.

The question now is whether the industry can hold the ground long enough to meet them.

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

News & Media Research Centre
Faculty of Arts & Design

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA
CANBERRA ACT 2601
AUSTRALIA

Australian Government Higher Education Registered (CRICOS) Provider #00212K.

Information in this report was correct at time of printing. Up-to-date information is available on the University's website: canberra.edu.au/nmrc

Printed June 2026

canberra.edu.au/nmrc