

# SUBMISSION TO THE DIGITAL PLATFORM SERVICES INQUIRY

*March 2023 Interim Report on Social Media Services  
Issues Paper*

## Submission authors

Sora Park, Professor, News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra  
Tanya Notley, Associate Professor, Western Sydney University

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## The scope of the submission

In this submission we are responding to the following items outlined in the Key Issues section in the *Digital Platform Services Inquiry - March 2023 Report on Social Media Services Issues Paper*.

- 1) Who are the most significant suppliers of social media services for users in Australia? Has this changed over time?
- 2) Why is it important for users to have access to social media services?
- 6) To what extent do users use more than one social media service?
- 27) Has the development of social networking features and related services by social media platforms led to new consumer harms, and/or exacerbated existing consumer harms?

## Overview & recommendation

### About the authors

This submission is based on the authors' research and expertise on news and media audiences, and media literacy.

**Sora Park** is Professor of Communication and Professorial Research Fellow at the News & Media Research Centre, Faculty of Arts & Design, University of Canberra. She is internationally recognised as an expert in digital media users and media policy, with a special focus on news consumers and digital inclusion. She leads the annual *Digital News Report: Australia*, a national annual online survey of more than 2,000 adult Australians that monitors changes in news consumption, as part of a global study of 46 news markets by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. She is the project leader of the *Heartbeat of Australia* study, that tracks local news audiences' news consumption and wellbeing, in collaboration with the Australian Community Media.

**Tanya Notley** is Associate Professor of Communication at Western Sydney University. Her research is focused on digital inclusion and media literacy. She leads a bi-annual national survey study of young Australians' news engagement practices and a bi-annual survey study of adult Australians' media literacy abilities. Tanya Notley is Deputy Chair of the Australian Media Literacy Alliance, which advocates for a national approach to media literacy education. She also co-leads the Platform for Civic Media Literacy at Institute for Culture and Society, which collaborates with industry and civil society organisations to address challenges associated with digital and social media including misinformation, digital exclusion, media bias and political polarisation.

For inquiries about this submission, please contact [nmrc@canberra.edu.au](mailto:nmrc@canberra.edu.au).

## Background

Social media environments are changing the way people access and receive information including news and advertising<sup>1</sup>. Most Australians have a complex and hybrid style of media consumption, that combines traditional media, social media platforms, and information received directly from friends and families, governments and organisations<sup>2</sup>.

Research shows that social media play an important role in society and Australians want to use it for diverse purposes: to connect with family and friends; for entertainment; to access, share and discuss news and information; and to participate in community, social and political action. To support these activities, it is important to acknowledge the benefits but also address the risks and harms associated with social media use.

Our submission is primarily informed by data from two research<sup>3</sup> surveys we have conducted:

- *Digital News Report: Australia (2016-2022)*
- *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences & Needs (2021)*

In addition to including data from published reports, we conducted further analysis of the survey datasets to answer the questions raised by this Inquiry and Issues Paper.

Both studies examine behaviours and attitudes of online adult Australians (aged 18+) and they consider gender, geographic and generational differences in media use.

The data for the *Digital News Report: Australia (2016-2022)* was collected in Jan/Feb each year by YouGov using an online questionnaire. The final sample is reflective of the Australian population that has access to the internet. The data were weighted to targets based on age, gender, region, education level to represent the total population based on Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data 2016.

The data for the *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences & Needs (2021)* report was collected from an online survey conducted between November 2 and December 6, 2020, administered by McNair yellowSquares. We applied demographic quotas set according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census data based on age, gender, region and education. A total of n=3,510 respondents completed the survey. When conducting the analysis, we applied a weight to adjust the sample to be reflective of the Australian adult population.

We also draw data from other relevant sources throughout the report.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Consumer & Competition Commission (ACCC). (2019). Digital Platforms Inquiry Final Report. Canberra: ACCC.

<sup>2</sup> Park, S., McGuinness, K., Fisher, C., Lee, J., K., McCallum, K. & Nolan, D. (2022). *Digital News Report: Australia 2022*. Canberra: News & Media Research Centre. <https://doi.org/10.25916/1xkk-jb37>; Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. (2021). *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs*. Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra. [https://westernsydney.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/1824640/Australian\\_adult\\_media\\_literacy\\_report\\_2021.pdf](https://westernsydney.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1824640/Australian_adult_media_literacy_report_2021.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The reports are available on N&MRC website: *Digital News Report: Australia (2016-2022)* <https://www.canberra.edu.au/research/faculty-research-centres/nmrc/digital-news-report-australia-2021> and WSU website: *Adult Media Literacy in Australia (2021)* [https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/1824640/Australian\\_adult\\_media\\_literacy\\_report\\_2021.pdf](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1824640/Australian_adult_media_literacy_report_2021.pdf)

## Recommendation

For citizens to survive and thrive in the digital age, they need to be media literate. Social media use increases the need for sustained, lifelong media literacy education.

**The majority of adult Australians use social media platforms for multiple purposes.** However, our research suggests that **most adults do not have the ability to mitigate or address the potential risks or harms associated with social media use.** This includes the ability to secure their privacy, deal with harassment and offensive content, identify misinformation and disinformation, or decide whether an information source is trustworthy.

While it is important to have adequate regulatory environments and policies in place to address these issues, it is equally important to equip consumers with the ability to avoid, discern and respond to harmful content and actors on social media platforms. Based on findings from our research, **we recommend that media literacy programs should be developed for all Australians** and these programs should consider and include specific kinds of knowledge and abilities that are required for social media use.

**There is currently a lack of systematic media literacy programs in Australia, particularly for adults<sup>4</sup>.** Our research suggests that a priority should be placed on specific programs designed to target adults with a low level of critical media abilities.

Many advanced economies now have a national policy, strategy and framework for media literacy. For example, the Netherlands Government has funded public institutions since 2008 to implement a national framework that focuses on supporting all citizens to become media literate<sup>5</sup>. In Finland, the National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI) has a statutory duty to promote media education in Finland while a national media education policy ensures that media literacy is integrated across policy areas with a focus on all ages, starting at early childhood education<sup>6</sup>.

**Several Australian parliamentary inquiries have recommended greater government support for media literacy.** The *2021 Australian Senate Inquiry Report into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy* recommends that the Australian Government should work with the Australian Media Literacy Alliance<sup>7</sup>, through a co-design process, to develop a national strategy to tackle fake news and misinformation<sup>8</sup>. Prior to this inquiry, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC) *Digital Platforms Inquiry Final Report (2019)* recommended that 'a Government program be established to fund and certify non-government organisations for the delivery of digital media literacy resources and training' and that 'the Terms of Reference for the review of the Australian Curriculum scheduled for 2020 should include consideration of the approach to digital media literacy education in Australian

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<sup>4</sup> Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. (2021). *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs*. Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mediawijzer.net/about-dutch-media-literacy-network/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://medialukutaitosuomessa.fi/mediaeducationpolicy.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://medialiteracy.org.au/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal\\_and\\_Constitutional\\_Affairs/Nationhood](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Nationhood)

schools<sup>9</sup>. The Australian Government has since accepted both recommendations<sup>10</sup>. However, progress has been slow.

National approaches to media literacy education support governments, media literacy educators and civil society organisations to work together in a coherent way while allowing for benchmarking over time. This, in turn, enables an evidence-based approach. We support the national approach advocated for by the Australian Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA)<sup>11</sup>. While this approach focuses primarily on the opportunities that media literacy provides, AMLA also acknowledges that it is also important to ensure media risks and harms are also addressed.

Our submission addresses some of these social media risks and harms, and argues they should be made key priorities for media literacy initiatives and programs. While we focus on the role media literacy education can play in addressing social media harms in this submission, we acknowledge that appropriate regulation, industry codes and legal changes are also essential.

### **Priority 1: Minimise the spread and impact of misinformation on social media through media literacy**

Social media use has changed the way most consumers find and access information and news. People encounter an overwhelming amount of information on social media which can lead to news avoidance, fatigue, and disengagement<sup>12</sup>. Verified and trustworthy news is presented alongside a mix of low quality information, misinformation and disinformation. This can make it difficult for social media users to distinguish between false and trustworthy information and doing so can be time intensive. In fact, our research shows that **Australians are not equipped with adequate media literacy to discern and respond to misinformation**. Only about one third of adult Australians are confident they can identify misinformation and disinformation online<sup>13</sup>.

In recent years, governments and industry have made efforts to reduce the impact of false and misleading information online. The *Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation* is now in place, with the aim of reducing the spread of misinformation by labelling, demoting or removing content. This voluntary code has been adopted by Adobe, Apple, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Redbubble, TikTok and Twitter<sup>14</sup>. Despite these efforts, the data show an increase in people's experience of misinformation and continuing high levels of concern about it<sup>15</sup>. Adult **Australians believe it is the responsibility of platforms, followed by governments, and then social media users**, to address the issue of

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.accc.gov.au/publications/digital-platforms-inquiry-final-report>

<sup>10</sup> See the Government response and implementation roadmap <https://treasury.gov.au/publication/p2019-41708>

<sup>11</sup> <https://medialiteracy.org.au/national-agenda-for-change/>

<sup>12</sup> Park, S., McGuinness, K., Fisher, C., Lee, J., K., McCallum, K. & Nolan, D. (2022). *Digital News Report: Australia 2022*. Canberra: News & Media Research Centre.

<sup>13</sup> Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. (2021). *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs*. Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra.

<sup>14</sup> <https://digi.org.au/disinformation-code/>

<sup>15</sup> Park, S., McGuinness, K., Fisher, C., Lee, J., K., McCallum, K. & Nolan, D. (2022). *Digital News Report: Australia 2022*. Canberra: News & Media Research Centre.

misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms<sup>16</sup>. Consumers are aware that they have a role to play.

## Priority 2: Ensure there is greater operational transparency on digital platforms

Our research shows that most users do not understand the Terms & Conditions of social media platforms, they don't know how to change their privacy settings and far too many people don't know how to report harassment or offensive content when they encounter it.

Content on social media is often algorithmically tailored to an individual's geographic location, their past online behaviour and by various personal information about them that has been provided to or obtained by the platforms<sup>17</sup>. The content and information that people see on social media is also influenced by their social networks and interactions on platforms<sup>18</sup> as well as by the host platform which often prioritises or deprioritises certain content<sup>19</sup>.

However, **rarely are consumers informed about the underlying factors that have determined what content is made visible to them.** It is important that consumers have the ability to understand how the algorithmic design of platforms determine or influence what they see.

We believe that full media literacy is constrained without greater transparency about how social media platforms operate. **Consumers should also be made aware of and how they can control or influence the personalised content and advertising** that are delivered. They also need to **regularly be informed about reporting options** for harassment and offensive content. For this, both regulatory and educational efforts are needed.

## Priority 3: Promote the evaluation of media literacy initiatives

To inform the design of effective media literacy programs and enable national benchmarking, evaluation data is required. To date, **there is a lack of rigorous evaluation of media literacy initiatives in Australia** that could be used to inform the design of programs. Therefore, it is important that any government, social media platform or philanthropic media literacy funding opportunities are linked to a shared, rigorous evaluation approach.

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<sup>16</sup> Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. (2021). *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs*. Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra.

<sup>17</sup> Wardle, C. (2018). *Information disorder: The essential glossary*. Harvard, MA: Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy. Harvard Kennedy School.; Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression*. New York University Press.

<sup>18</sup> Helberger, N., Karppinen, K. & D'Acunto, L. (2018). Exposure diversity as a design principle for recommender systems. *Information Communication & Society* 21(2), 191–207.

<sup>19</sup> Crawford, K. & Gillespie, T. (2016). What is a flag for? Social media reporting tools and the vocabulary of complaint, *New Media & Society* 18(3), 410–428.; Matamoros-Fernandez, A., Gray, J. E., Bartolo, L., Burgess, J., & Suzor, N. (2021). What's "Up Next"? Investigating Algorithmic Recommendations on YouTube Across Issues and Over Time. *Media and Communication*, 9(4), 234-249.



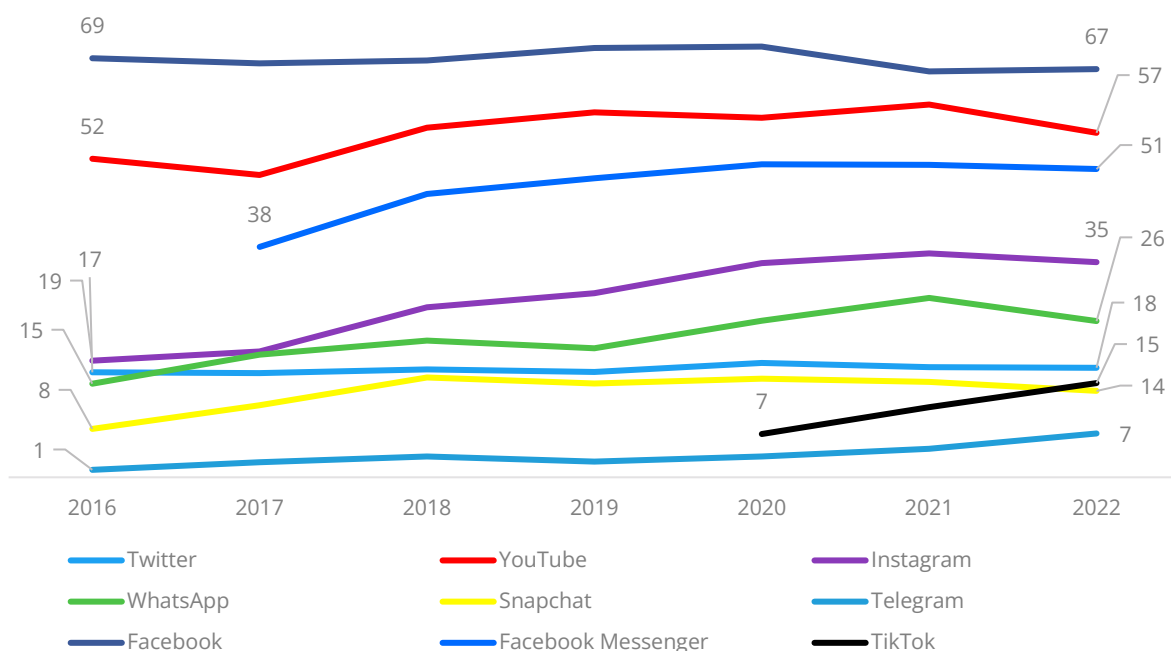
## Australians' use of social media platforms

This section of our submission provides an overview of how adult Australians use social media platforms in their everyday lives.

According to the *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences & Needs (2021) survey*, social media strongly dominates the everyday media practices of Australians, with 83% of adults using social media on a daily basis. Only about 9% of adults identify as non-users of social media, which was also the case in the *Digital News Report: Australia 2022* (9%).

While Facebook (67%) is the most popular social media platform among Australians, most Australians access multiple social media platforms and use them for various purposes (Figure 1). Overall, the use of social media platforms is increasing among Australians.

FIGURE 1: SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM USE (%)

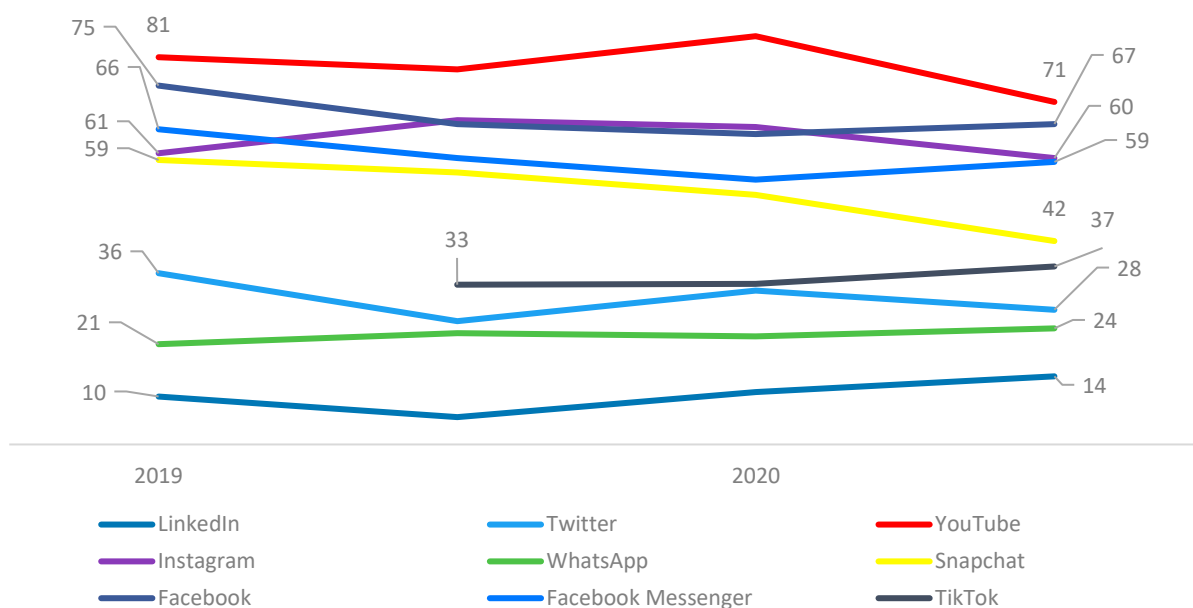


\*Source: *Digital News Report: Australia (2016-2022)*. [Q12A] Which, if any, of the following have you used for any purpose in the last week? Please select all that apply.

Younger adult's use of social media is more diversified and tends to change rapidly based on their peers' usage. For example, Gen Z (those who are born on or after 1997<sup>20</sup>) tend to use multiple social media platforms and their preferences have changed relatively quickly over time. Platforms such as Facebook and Snapchat are losing young users and in contrast, new platforms - such as TikTok - are gaining popularity (Figure 2).

<sup>20</sup> In this report, we have adopted the generational categories used by [Pew Research](#), which roughly equates to the following age grouping: Pre-Baby Boomers (76+ as of 2022) 1945 or before; Baby Boomers (BB) born 1946-1964; Gen X born 1965-1980; Gen Y born 1981-1996; Gen Z born 1997-2005.

FIGURE 2: GEN Z'S SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM USE (%)



\*Source: Digital News Report: Australia (2019-2022). [Q12A] Which, if any, of the following have you used for any purpose in the last week? Please select all that apply.

Facebook use is more dominant among older generations, with 70% of Baby Boomers and 64% of those aged 76+ using Facebook. Among Baby Boomers, the gap between the top social media platform – Facebook (70%) – and the second most used – Facebook Messenger (48%) – is much greater than that of Gen Z where 71% used YouTube, 67% used Facebook and 60% used Instagram (Table 1). In other words, there is more concentration in the use of social media platforms among older generations, whereas younger generations’ use of social media is more spread across multiple platforms.

TABLE 1: TOP 3 SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS BY GENERATION (%)

	Z	Y	X	BB	76+
<b>1</b>	YouTube 71	Facebook 65	Facebook 66	Facebook 70	Facebook 64
<b>2</b>	Facebook 67	YouTube 63	YouTube 62	Facebook Messenger 48	YouTube 38
<b>3</b>	Instagram 60	Instagram 57	Facebook Messenger 53	YouTube 47	Facebook Messenger 38

## The importance of social media to Australians

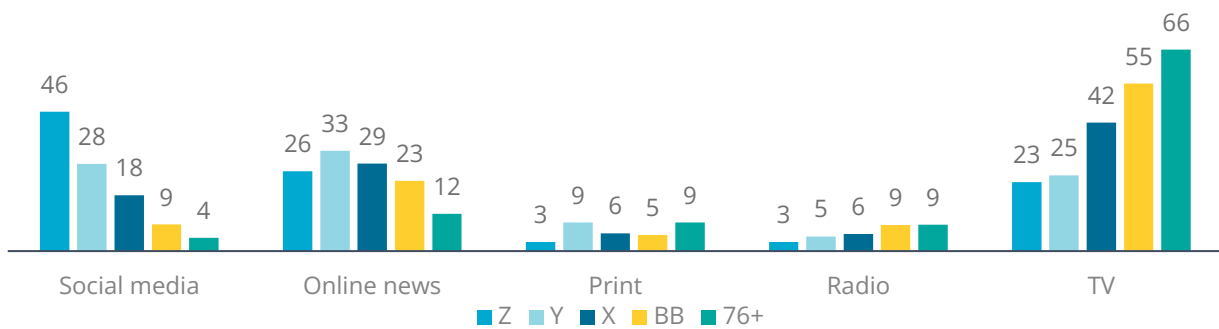
In this report, we focus mainly on informational uses of social media. However, we recognise that information-seeking has become embedded within other activities online (such as watching videos or interacting with friends). This means that people are more likely than before to encounter information and news incidentally, while they are doing other things.

## The use of social media services to get news

Getting news and information is an important aspect of social media usage. In 2022, 44% of adults used social media to get news on a weekly basis. While TV is still the most popular source of news (60%), followed by websites/apps (49%), social media is the third most used platform for news. Only 26% use the radio and 22% read newspapers for news.

When asked about the main source of news 19% say it is social media, compared to TV 42%, websites/apps 26%, radio 6% and newspaper 6%. These figures contrast strongly among different generations; almost half (46%) of Gen Z mainly use social media to get news (Figure 3).

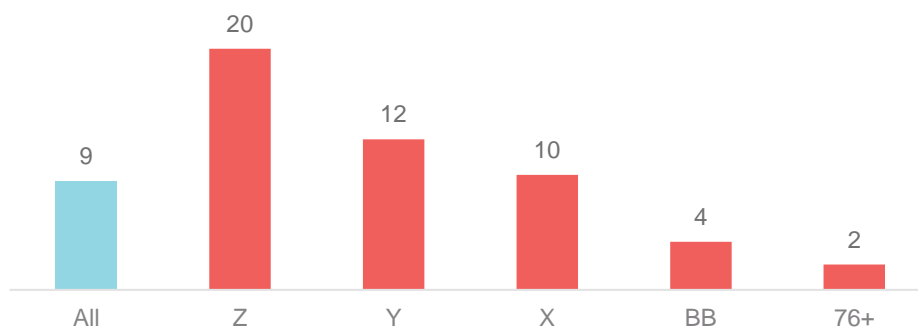
FIGURE 3: MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS BY GENERATION (%)



\*Source: Park et al. (2022a). [Q4] You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your main source of news?

Most consumers access multiple sources of news. However, one in ten Australians only use social media to get news. This figure doubles among Gen Z, where 20% access news only through social media (Figure 4). As a society, it is important to ensure that the information environment on social media platforms is trustworthy and that people are able to discern quality information from mis- or disinformation.

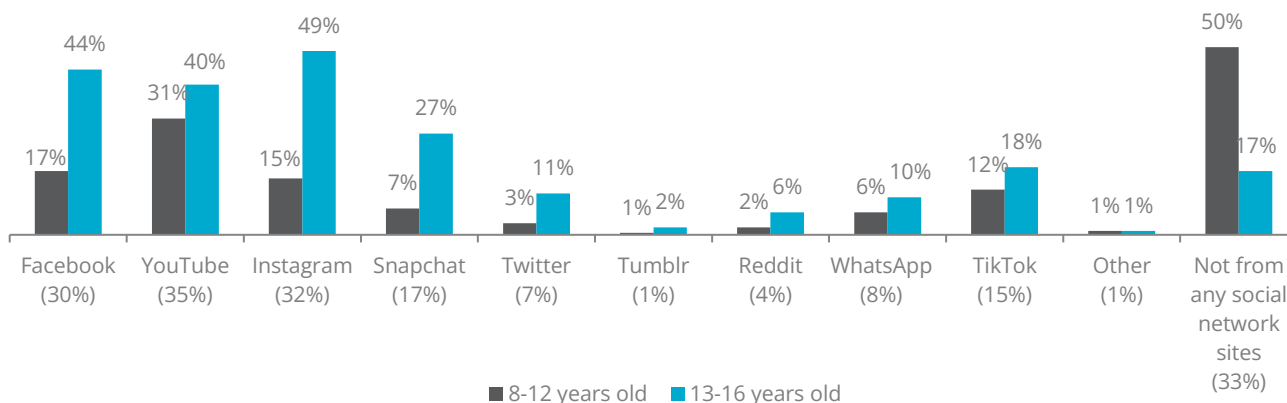
FIGURE 4: EXCLUSIVE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NEWS (%)



\*Source: Park et al. (2022a). [Q3] Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news? Please select all that apply. Those who only selected 'social media' are included in the figure.

Social media is also an important news source for younger generations. A national survey carried out with younger Australians in 2020, revealed that two-thirds (75%) of teens aged 13-16 use social media to get news 'often' or 'sometimes'. Instagram was the most popular platform used by teens to get news (49%), followed by Facebook (44%) and YouTube (40%). A little over one third (38%) of children aged 8-12 years use social media to get news 'often' or 'sometimes'. For children, YouTube is the platform they use most for this purpose (31%) followed by Instagram (15%). The use of social media to get news increased considerably between the 2017 and 2020 surveys, while the popularity of platforms also changed markedly during this period (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5: SOCIAL MEDIA SITES YOUNG PEOPLE USE TO GET NEWS STORIES AND NEWS HEADLINES (%)

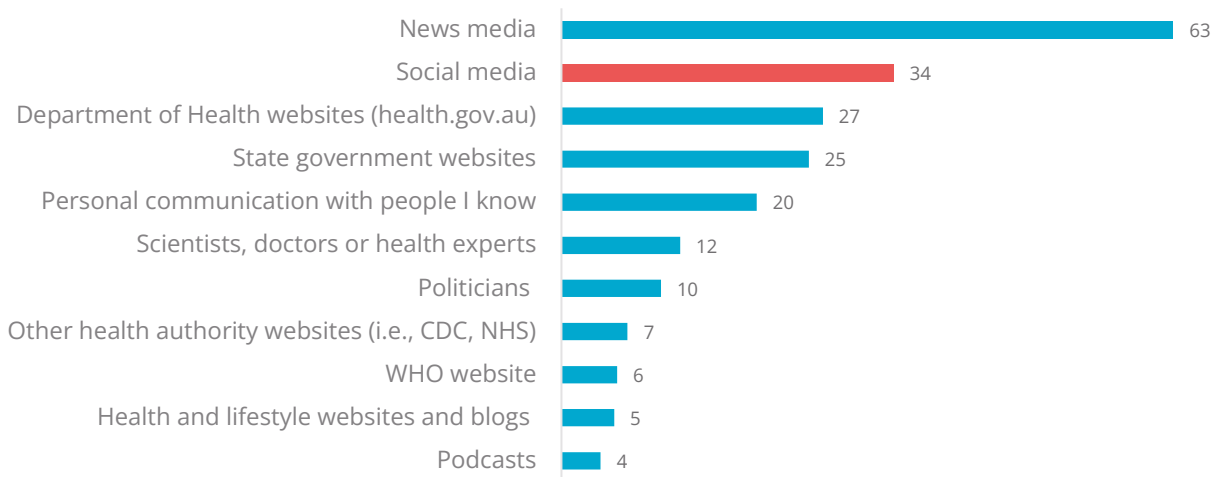


\*Source: Notley et al. (2020). [Q11] Do you ever get news stories or news headlines on any of the social media sites listed below?

## The use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic

In a study conducted about a year into the Covid-19 pandemic, we asked consumers where they get critical information about the pandemic. News media (63%) was the top source of news for Covid-19 information. The second most popular source was social media with more than one-third (34%) see Covid-19 news on social media. This figure is higher than government websites (Federal 27%; State 25%), or doctors and experts (12%) (Figure 6).

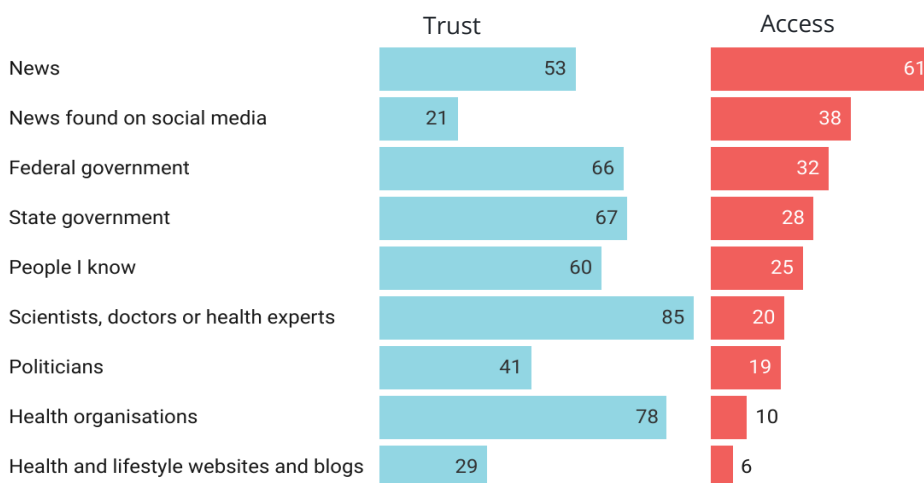
FIGURE 6: SOURCES OF NEWS ABOUT COVID-19 (%)



\*Source: Park et al. (2022b). Q6. Which, if any, of the following have you accessed in the last week as a source of news or information about COVID-19? Please select all that apply.

While people rely on social media to get essential information, trust in the news found on social media is low. The majority of adults have low trust in news found on social media (21%) in the context of Covid-19 related information and news. Despite this low trust, more than one-third (38%) still accessed news on social media in the early days of the pandemic (April 2020) (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7: ACCESS AND TRUST IN COVID-19 NEWS (%)

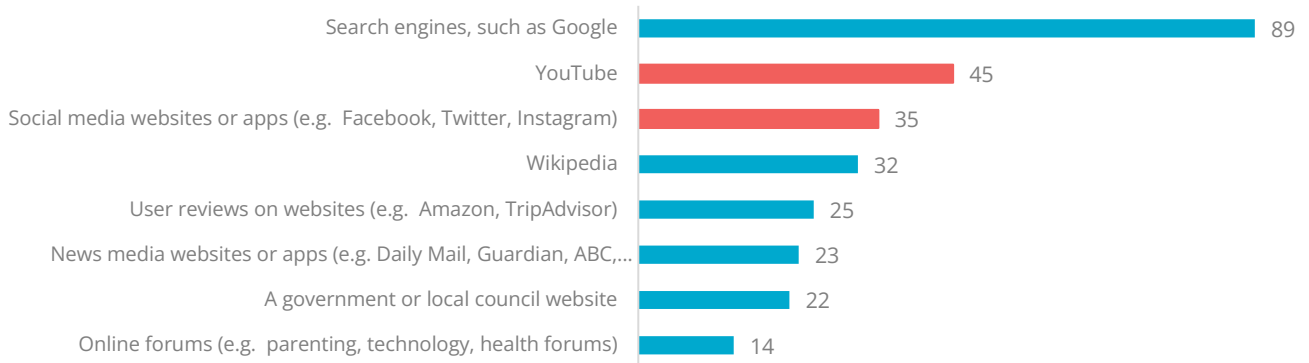


\*Source: Park et al. (2020). Q6. Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news or information about the coronavirus? Q10. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about news and information provided about the coronavirus? I think I can trust...

The critical role that social media play in Australians' everyday lives is reflected in how content on social media is used to inform their everyday decision-making. We asked respondents what online sites they used to search for information when they needed to make a decision.

The top source was search engines (89%), followed by YouTube (45%) and social media (35%). The use of social media for this purpose was higher than news websites or apps (23%) or government websites (22%) (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8: ONLINE INFORMATION SOURCES PEOPLE USE WHEN THEY NEED TO MAKE A DECISION (%)



\*Source: Notley et al. (2021). AU.11 In the past month, which of these online sources (if any) have you used to search for information when you needed to make a decision?

When we compare the findings by generation, half of Gen Z (50%) and Gen Y (51%) said they used social media websites or apps (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to get information when they needed to make a decision (Table 2). This heavy reliance on social media for decision-making among younger generations indicate the critical role social media in their lives.

TABLE 2: ONLINE INFORMATION SOURCES PEOPLE USE WHEN THEY NEED TO MAKE A DECISION BY GENERATION (%)

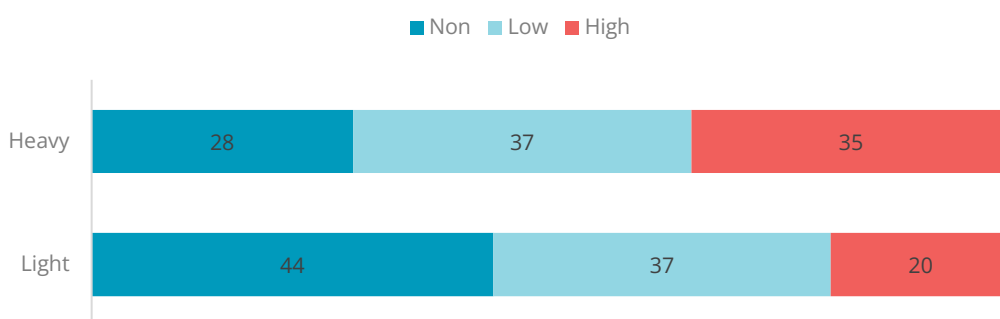
	Z	Y	X	BB+
Search engines, such as Google	89	88	91	89
YouTube	72	54	47	32
Social media websites or apps (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)	50	51	32	20
Wikipedia	38	33	33	28
User reviews on websites (e.g. Amazon, TripAdvisor)	40	30	26	17
News media websites or apps (e.g. Daily Mail, Guardian, ABC, nine.com.au)	27	22	26	21
A government or local council website	23	19	22	23
Online forums (e.g. parenting, technology, health forums)	25	20	15	5

\*Source: Notley et al. (2021). AU.11 In the past month, which of these online sources (if any) have you used to search for information when you needed to make a decision?

## Social media and civic engagement

Social media platforms can provide opportunities to engage with social and political issues for ordinary citizens. We examined the relationship between social media use<sup>21</sup> and people's level of civic engagement<sup>22</sup> and found that those who are more active online are also more likely to be engaged in more civic activities, such as following politicians or political parties on social media, commenting about political or social issues online, discussion political or community issues with others, keeping up to date about national politics, participating in community organisations or groups, participating in petitions, and attending political events. Adults who are more frequent users of social media have higher levels of civic engagement. More than one-third (35%) of those who are heavy social media users have high levels of civic engagement, compared to only 20% of light social media users (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT BY SOCIAL MEDIA USE (%)



\*Source: Notley et al. (2021). CE.1 Thinking about your activities in the past twelve months have you done any of the following? (Tick all that apply).

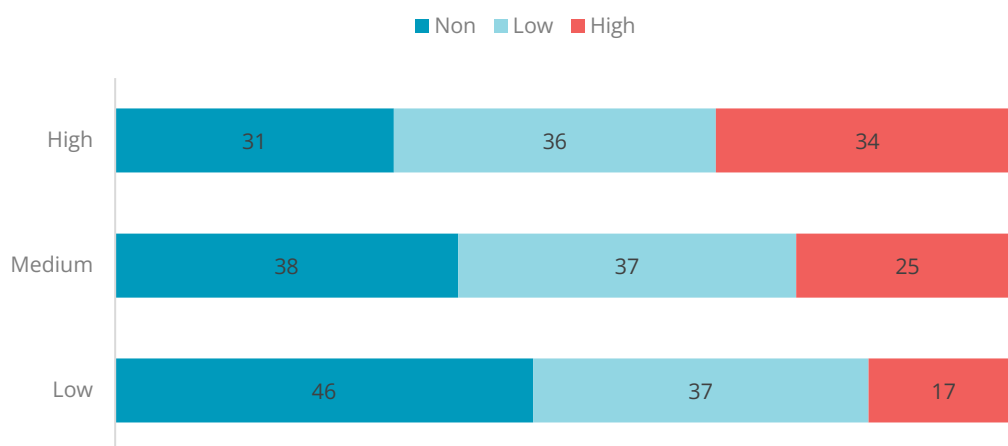
The role of media literacy is also important in the context of civic engagement. To use digital platforms effectively, users need necessary skills and knowledge. We found that those with high confidence in their media abilities<sup>23</sup> are twice as more likely to participate actively in civic engagement (high participation) than those who have low confidence. Almost half (46%) of those with low media literacy do not engage in any civic activities (Figure 10). The lack of confidence in using social media and online platforms may affect the ability to participate in society among adult Australians.

<sup>21</sup> To reflect the diversity and frequency of social media use, we grouped respondents into light and heavy social media users based on the frequency and number of social media platforms used. We gave respondents a list of 16 social media platforms and asked them how frequently they used each of them, the scores ranging from 'do not use' to 'more than 10 times a day'. We used the additive sum of the frequency of the 16 platforms. Those who scored up to 20 were classified as 'light' and 20+ as 'heavy'.

<sup>22</sup> The level of civic engagement was measured by asking respondents if they had participated in each of seven different civic engagement activities in the past 12 months. We grouped respondents into high (3 or more activities), low (1 or 2 activities) and none.

<sup>23</sup> Media literacy was estimated by asking respondents their confidence level of 12 media abilities. Using the additive measure, we grouped respondents into low (35%), medium (34%) and high (30%).

FIGURE 10: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT BY MEDIA LITERACY (%)



\*Source: Notley et al. (2021). CE.1 Thinking about your activities in the past twelve months have you done any of the following? (Tick all that apply).

## Number of social media platforms used by Australians

On average, Australians use 3.5 social media platforms for general purposes and 1.2 for news. Younger people are much more likely to use multiple platforms. The average number of social media platforms used for any purpose is 5.3 among Gen Z, 4.5 among Gen Y, compared to only 2 among those aged 76 or older (Table 3).

TABLE 3: MEAN NUMBER OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS USED IN THE PAST WEEK (%)

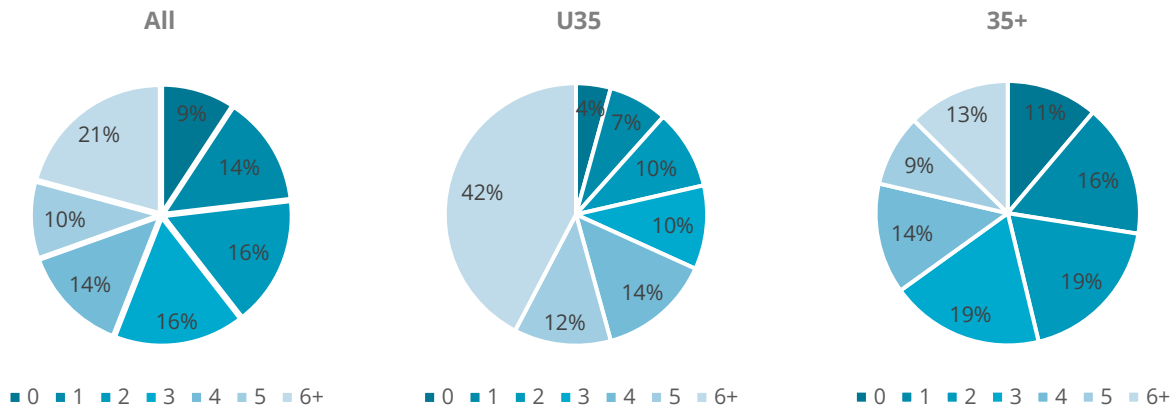
	For anything	For news
Gen Z	5.3	1.7
Gen Y	4.5	1.8
Gen X	3.5	1.2
Baby Boomers	2.5	0.7
76+	2.0	0.5
TOTAL	3.5	1.2

\*Source: Park et al. (2022a). [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.

Those who are under the age of 35 use a wider range of social media platforms compared to those aged 35 and above. Forty-two percent of U35 use 6 or more social media platforms on a weekly basis, compared to only 13% of those aged 35 and above (Figure 11).



FIGURE 11: NUMBER OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS BY AGE GROUP

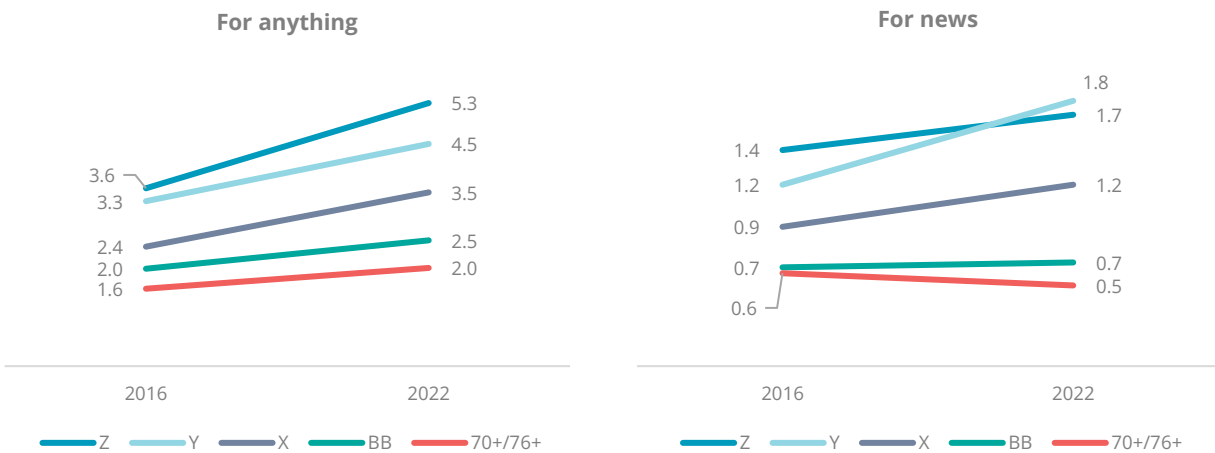


\*Source: Park et al. (2022a)

The number of social media platforms Australians use on average has grown over time. In 2016, Australians used 2.5 social media platforms for general use, and 0.9 platforms for news. This increased to 3.5 and 1.2 respectively in 2022. The increase in the number of social media platforms people use increased at a higher rate among younger generations, and the gap with other generations is widening (Figure 12).

These trends indicate that when new platforms are offered, rather than replacing the existing platforms, people tend to increase their overall usage. This is especially the case among younger generations.

FIGURE 12: CHANGE IN THE MEAN NUMBER OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS



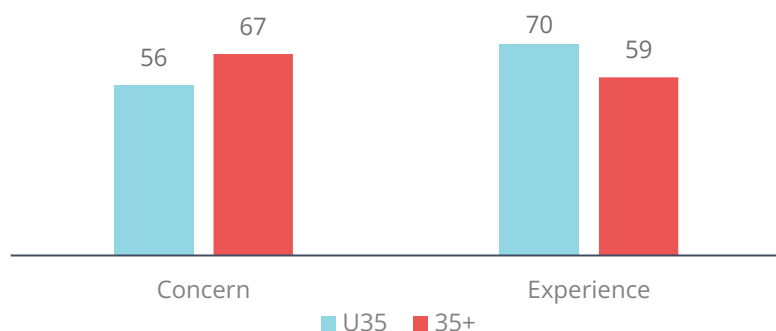
\*Source: Park et al. (2016); Park et al. (2022a).

# Social media and consumer harms

## Misinformation on social media

Misinformation is pervasive on digital platforms; 62% of Australians had encountered online misinformation in the past week according to *the Digital News Report: Australia 2022*, which is a 3 percentage point increase since the previous year. Younger people tend to have higher experience of misinformation; 70% of U35 experienced misinformation compared to 56% of 35+ (Figure 10). In contrast the concern level is lower among U35 (56%) than 35+ (67%). Overall, the concern level among Australians is 64% (Figure 13).

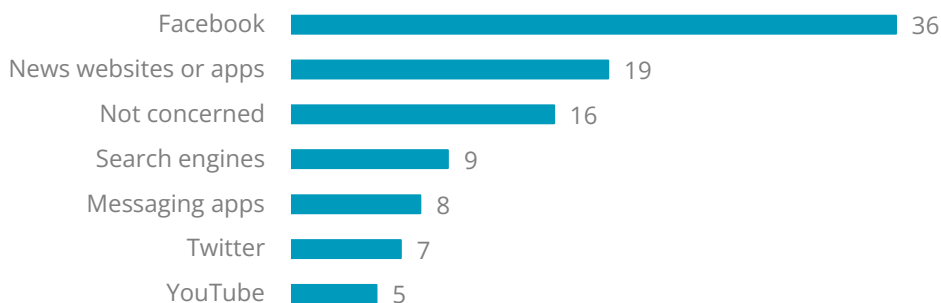
FIGURE 13: EXPERIENCE OF AND CONCERN ABOUT MISINFORMATION ONLINE BY AGE GROUP (%)



\*Source: Park et al. (2022a). [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.; [Q\_FAKE\_NEWS\_2021a] Have you seen false or misleading information about any of the following topics, in the last week? Please select all that apply.

When asked about the most concerning source of COVID-19 misinformation, Facebook is ranked as the top platform consumers are concerned about (36%). Many consumers are also concerned about other social media platforms such as messaging apps, Twitter and YouTube (Figure 14).

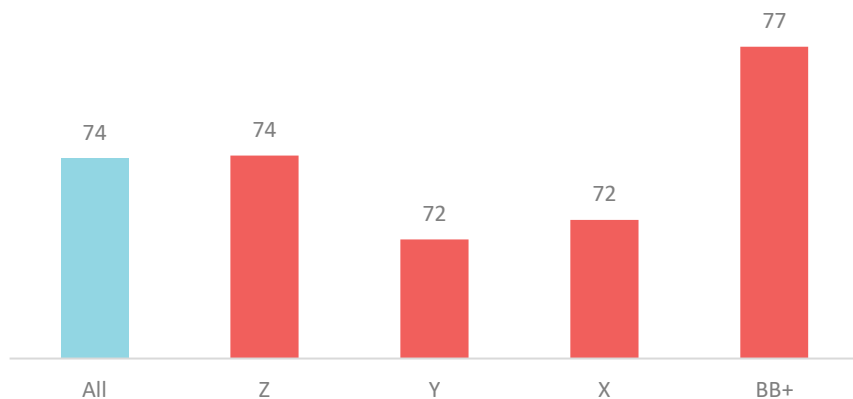
FIGURE 14: MOST CONCERNING SOURCE OF MISINFORMATION (%)



\*Source: Park et al. (2020). [Q\_FAKE\_NEWS\_2021c] Thinking specifically about coronavirus (COVID-19) and its effects, which of the following, if any, are you most concerned about online? Please select one.

Given the prevalence of misinformation, it is not surprising that the majority of Australians (74%) say that misinformation on social media is an issue that needs to be addressed (Figure 15).

FIGURE 15: PERCEPTIONS OF MISINFORMATION SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN ISSUE THAT NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED (%)

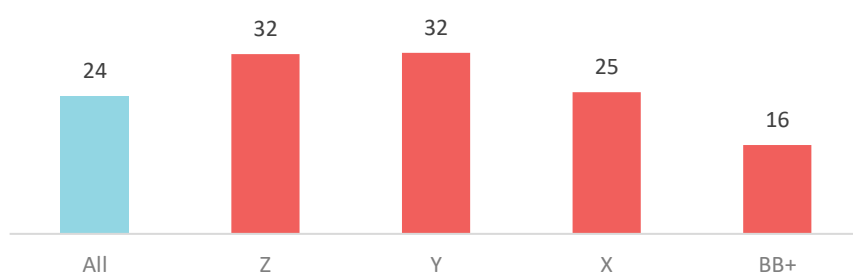


\*Source: Notley et al. (2021). R.1 Social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter) are sometimes associated with the spread of misinformation or 'fake' news. Do you think this is an issue that needs to be addressed in Australia?

## Offensive content on social media

Almost one quarter (24%) of Australians have 'often' or 'sometimes' encountered offensive content on social media in the past year. Another 25% said they did encounter offensive content but only rarely (Figure 16). Some groups were more likely to encounter offensive content on social media. Indigenous Australians were almost twice as likely to encounter offensive content on social media (44%) when compared to non-Indigenous Australians.

FIGURE 16: ADULTS WHO HAVE ENCOUNTERED OFFENSIVE CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA (%)



\*Source: Notley et al. (2021). AU.5 In the last 12 months, have you seen anything that offended you on any of the social media sites you use? Include responses 'Yes, often' and 'Yes, sometimes'.

For those who have encountered offensive material on social media, a large number of people did not take any action because they couldn't be bothered (32%) – but an equal number of people didn't take any action because they didn't know what to do (32%) (Table 4).

This suggests a lack of consumer knowledge on reporting options. Very few people (6%) stop using the site, which implies that they may continue to be exposed to offensive material.

TABLE 4: ACTIONS TAKEN AFTER ENCOUNTERING OFFENSIVE CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA (%)

<b>Actions</b>	<b>%</b>
I blocked the person who shared the content or made the comments	33
I responded to the person who shared the content or made the comments	14
I stopped using that social media site	6
I shared it to highlight the issue to others	6
I made a complaint to social media company	19
I made a complaint to the eSafety Commissioner	2
I didn't take any of these actions because I did not want to / couldn't be bothered	32
I didn't take any of these actions because I did not know how to	32
Unsure	5

*\*Source: Notley et al. (2021). AU.6 Did you take any of the following actions as a result of seeing this offensive content? (choose as many as apply).*

## Consumers' confidence in media abilities

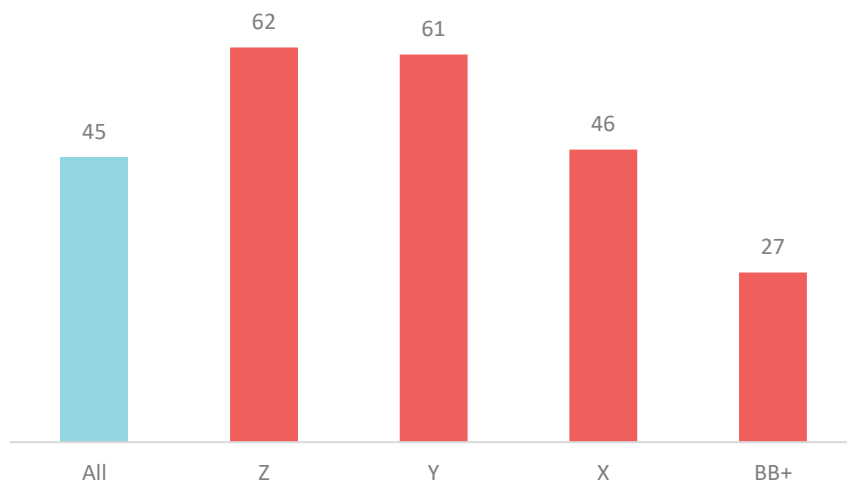
Media literacy is the ability to create, use and share media and to critically reflect on media use<sup>24</sup>. Our research reveals that most Australians have a low level of confidence in their media literacy abilities.

When asked to imagine that a friend needs help with tasks related to online media, and how confident they would be to provide this help, many Australians felt they lacked confidence. Younger consumers tend to have higher confidence, perhaps because they spend more time online and are used to using multiple social media platforms. Younger Australians were also more likely to say they received media literacy education and support when compared with older groups.

First of all, many people lack the ability to safely navigate online environments with less than half (45%) saying they know how to change privacy settings on social media (Figure 17).

<sup>24</sup> Australian Media Literacy Alliance. (n.d.). Media Literacy Framework. <https://medialiteracy.org.au/index.php/framework/>

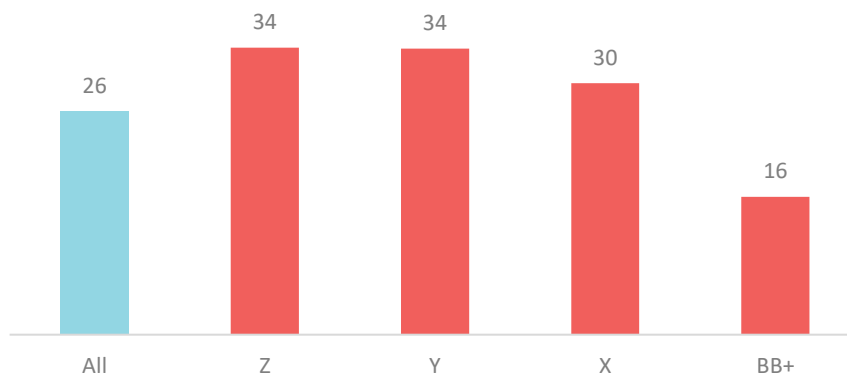
FIGURE 17: CONFIDENCE IN CHANGING PRIVACY SETTINGS ON SOCIAL MEDIA (%)



\*Source: Notley et al. (2021). C.1 Imagine a friend needs your help. How confident are you to help them with these tasks?

Even fewer adults (26%) understand the terms and conditions of social media platforms. This means they are unlikely to know what data these platforms collect from them or what rights and responsibilities they have when using the platform (Figure 18).

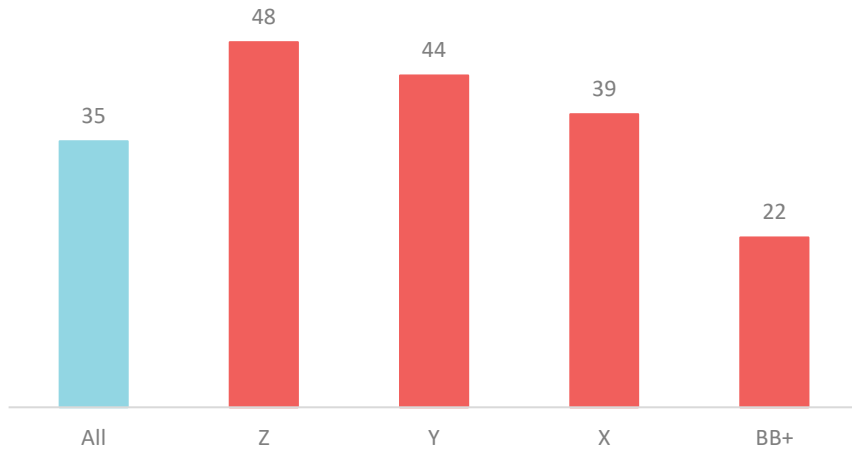
FIGURE 18: UNDERSTANDING TERMS OF SERVICES ON SOCIAL MEDIA (%)



\*Source: Notley et al. (2021). C.1 Imagine a friend needs your help. How confident are you to help them with these tasks?

Just over one-third (35%) of Australians are confident in dealing with online harassment. The majority of consumers lacked confidence to decide if they are being harassed online and how to seek help from the right authorities (Figure 19).

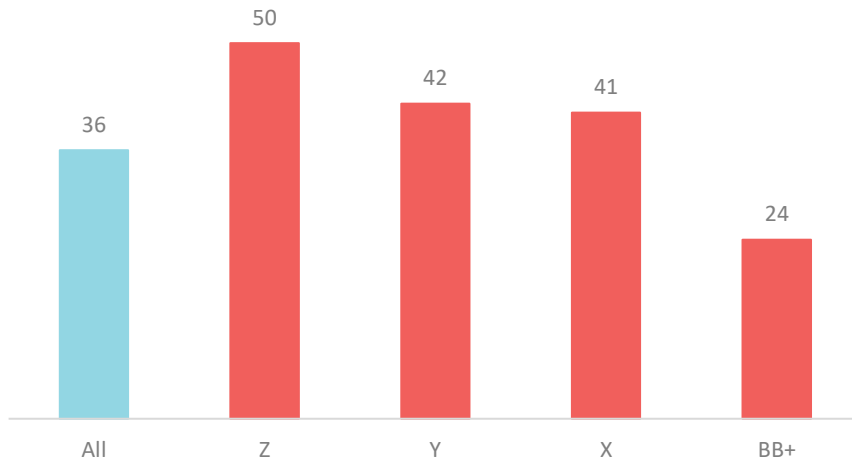
FIGURE 19: KNOWING IF THEY ARE BEING HARASSED ONLINE AND TO SEEK HELP FROM THE RIGHT AUTHORITIES (%)



\*Source: Notley et al. (2021). C.1 Imagine a friend needs your help. How confident are you to help them with these tasks?

The majority (64%) of consumers also lack the confidence in checking whether a website can be trusted (Figure 20).

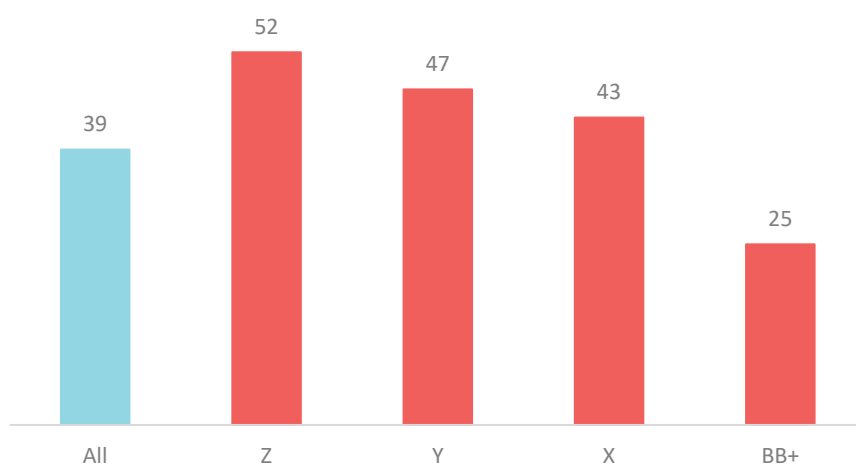
FIGURE 20: CONFIDENCE IN CHECKING IF A WEBSITE CAN BE TRUSTED (%)



\*Source: Notley et al. (2021). C.1 Imagine a friend needs your help. How confident are you to help them with these tasks?

Similarly, only about one-third (39%) of Australians said they were confident to check whether information they found online is true (Figure 21). These low confidence levels are concerning, given that the majority of Australians spend a lot of time on these platforms, seeking information that is essential to their everyday decision-making.

FIGURE 21: CONFIDENCE IN CHECKING WHETHER INFORMATION THEY FOUND ONLINE IS TRUE (%)



\*Source: Notley et al. (2021). C.1 Imagine a friend needs your help. How confident are you to help them with these tasks?

When we asked adults which sources of media literacy support people received across their lifetime, almost one-third (30%) said they had not received any form of support<sup>25</sup>. Among those who did get support, it came from informal networks; family (41%), friends (42%) and online resources (45%).

The lack of confidence among adult Australians in discerning misinformation on social media, identifying and dealing with online harassment or offensive content, and knowing how platforms operate, including how to change their privacy settings, is an urgent issue to be addressed by the government. We believe media literacy education is one important measure that is required to mitigate the harms introduced by social media to ensure that citizens can thrive online.

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