

Young People and NewsEngagement in 2020

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News Champions Forum 2019 at MoAD

Introduction

As part of Media Literacy Week 2020, ABC Education invited young Australians aged 10-17 years to complete a short survey about their news practices and experiences during the period September—October 2020. This survey was co-designed by students who attended the News Champions Forum, as part of Media Literacy Week in 2019.

These 21 News Champions, who came from every state and territory in Australia, spent two days discussing how young people should be included and represented in the news. As part of their discussions, the News Champions decided to develop a survey to help them better understand the experiences of other young Australians.

There were 560 responses to the survey. While the survey link was open to anyone to complete, and is therefore not statistically representative of young Australians, the responses suggest that a large number of students completed the survey in their classrooms with teacher support. Both ABC Education and MoAD (Museum of Australian Democracy) promoted the survey to their teacher networks.

The News Champions hope that the survey results can inform journalists, news organisations, teachers, politicians and parents who want to support young people's beneficial engagement with news media.

"The fact that almost 40% of young people believe their view is rarely or never reflected in news media tells us a lot about the 'gaps'... Addressing this underrepresentation is crucial to increase youth engagement and could even build better trust in news media platforms."

- Maitreyi Kulkarni, age 17, News Champion from NSW

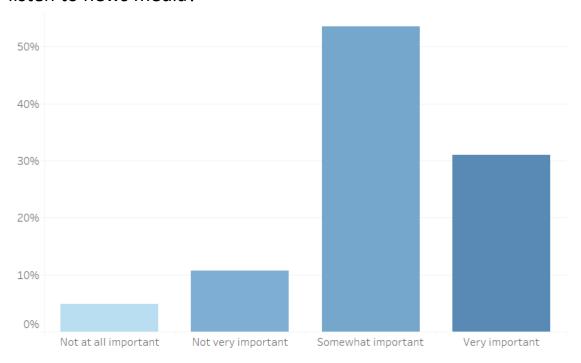
"While 56% of young Australians feel confident in identifying if news is fake or misleading, many are not. This may cause less interaction with news in the near future. To address this issue, tools should be developed to identify fake news on social media platforms and channels that broadcast news should make sure it is trustworthy as young people are very impressionable."

- Gauri Bhandari, age 14, News Champion from Queensland

The importance of news

The survey asked how important it is for young Australians to regularly read, watch or listen to news media. News media was defined "as media which provide news stories to the public including "newspapers, news websites, and television and radio news programs" and "news stories on social media networks like YouTube or Instagram."

How important is it for young Australian's to regularly read, watch or listen to news media?



Most young Australians who responded to the survey (84%) suggested it is important to regularly read, watch or listen to the news media. While, close to one third (31%) considered it to be very important, more than half (53%) felt it was somewhat important.

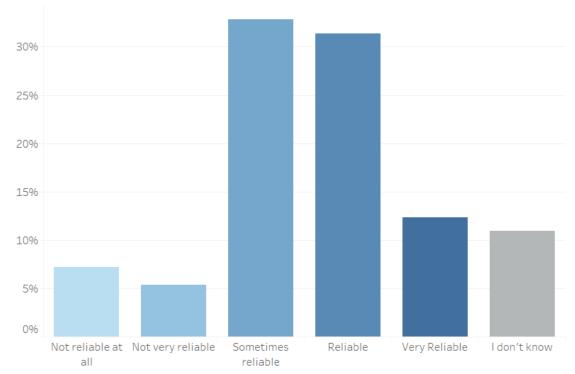
Two in ten young Australians said it is not important for young people to consume news media (11% said it is not very important and 5% not important at all).

These findings suggest that most of the young people who completed the survey believe it is important for young Australians to regularly consume news media.

The reliability of news

The survey asked young people how reliable the news is that they consume. Reliable news was defined as news that is "always good in quality or performance, and it's able to be trusted."





Less than half (43%) of the young Australians who responded to the survey considered the news they consume as reliable or very reliable.

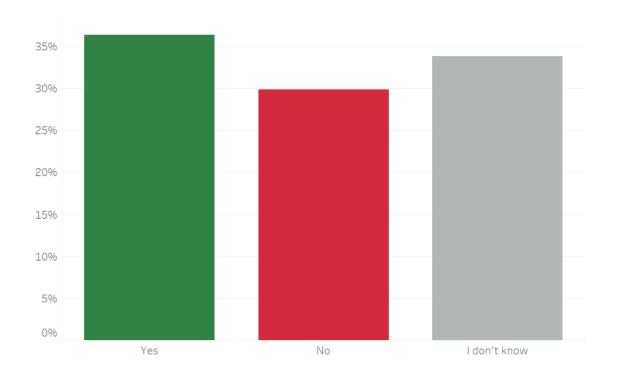
Around one third of respondents felt that the news they consume is only sometimes reliable (33%), with 12% considering it not very reliable or not reliable at all.

One in ten respondents (11%) stated they did not know how reliable the news they consume is.

Similarly, there were divided opinions about whether Australian news media organisations are fair and factual in the way they present the news. While more than one third (36%) of the respondents felt they are fair and factual, a similar number of respondents (34%) said they did not know if media organisations are fair and factual in the way they present the news, while 30% thought that they are not.

These findings suggest that less than half of the young Australians who completed survey believe that the news they consume is reliable, while only one third believe that news media in Australia is fair and factual.

Do you think Australian news media organisations are fair and factual in the way they present the news?



Coping with misinformation

The survey asked young people how worried they are about the impact of false information, which has been designed to mislead people in Australian society. Most young Australians (76%) expressed some concern regarding the impact of false information with almost half the respondents (49%) suggesting they are a little worried and a further 27% of respondents expressing that they were very worried about this.

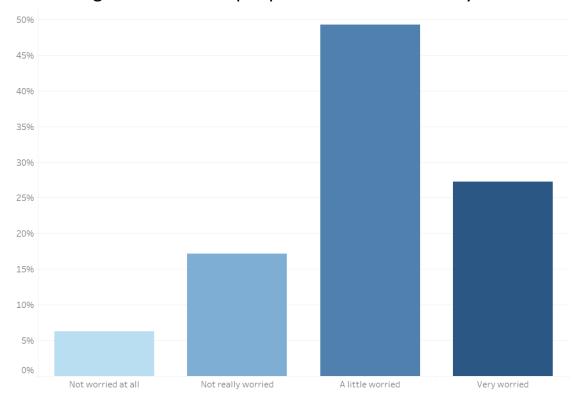
Two in ten respondents did not feel very worried or worried at all (25%).

When asked if they can recognise false information that has been designed to mislead people, more than half of the young Australians who responded (56%) said they feel confident about their ability: 41% feel quite confident and 15% feel very confident.

Just over one third (34%) suggested they were only a little confident, while one in ten (10%) said they do not feel confident at all in their ability to recognise false information.

The findings suggest that most young Australians who completed the survey are worried about the impact of false information, yet most feel confident they are able to recognise false information that has been designed to mislead people.

Are you worried about the impact of false information, which has been designed to mislead people in Australian society?



Do you feel confident that you can recognise false information that has been designed to mislead people?

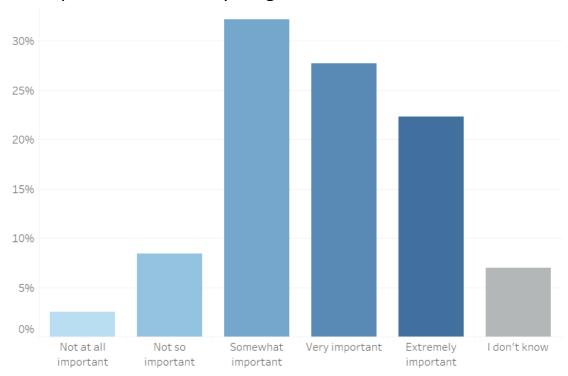


Including young people in the news

The survey asked the respondents if it is important to include young Australians in the news. Most respondents (82%) consider it important to include young Australians in the news: 22% believe it as extremely important, 28% believe it is very important and 32% believe it is somewhat important.

Just one in ten respondents felt it is not so important (8%) or not at all important (3%) to include young Australians in the news, while 7% of the respondents said they did not know if it is.

Is it important to include young Australians in the news?

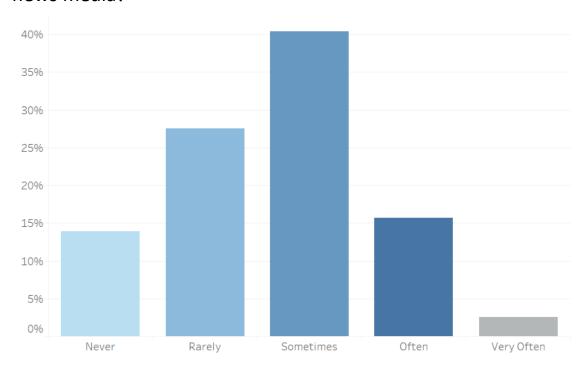


However, when asked whether young people feel their experience or point of view is reflected in the Australian news media, less than two in ten (19%), believe this happens often (16%) or very often (3%).

Four in ten respondents (40%) believe their point of view or experience is sometimes reflected in Australian media. Almost the same number of respondents felt that their experience point of view was either rarely reflected (27%) or never reflected (14%) in the Australian news media.

These findings suggest that most young people who responded to the survey believe it is important to include young people in the news, but most do not believe their experience or point of view is regularly reflected in the Australian news media.

Do you feel your experience or point of view is reflected in Australian news media?



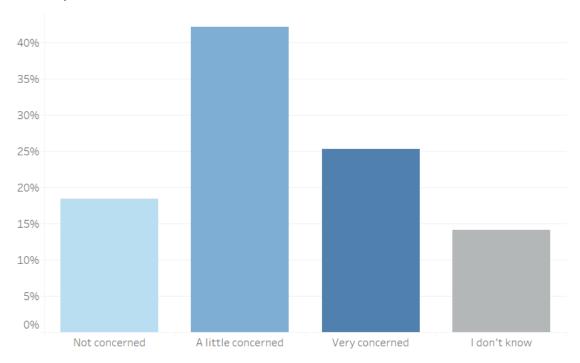
Social media sites and the abuse of personal data

The survey asked young people if they are concerned that social media sites abuse the use of their data when they click on news stories. Most of the young Australians who responded (67%) expressed concern about this with 42% feeling a little concerned and 25% feeling very concerned.

Almost two out ten respondents (18%) suggested they were not concerned about this issue and 14% of young people said they did not know if social media sites abuse the use of their data when they click on news stories.

The findings suggest that most of the young Australians who completed the survey are concerned about social media sites abusing the use of their data when they click on news stories.

Are you concerned that social media sites abuse the use of your data when you click on news stories?



How news makes young people feel

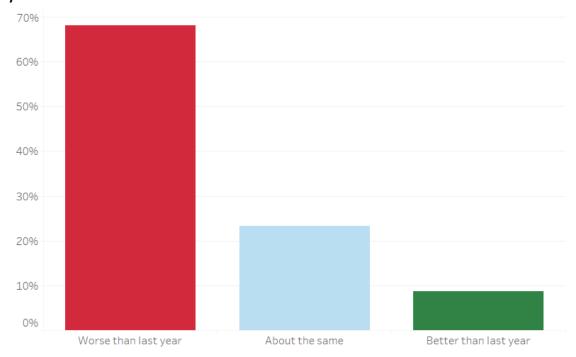
The content of news stories in 2020 has made young people overwhelmingly feel worse than they did last year (68%). When the survey asked young people to explain why they responded in the way they did, most of the responses gestured towards the negative and depressing events that have occurred in 2020.

"The world is falling apart and I'm not even old enough to vote or have my say."

"There are many terrible things happening in the world and it is hard to make a change when you're young."

"There's always bad things happening in the world but I feel that this year it's been a lot more constant and a lot more serious. The constant stream of disaster coverage and updates on coronavirus deaths provides a grim outlook on life. It's really depressing..."

Compared to last year, how has the news media made you feel this year?



The global Covid-19 pandemic, imposed restrictions, lockdowns, death rates and perceptions of "exaggerated" and inaccurate reporting were all frequently cited as reasons the respondents feel worse about the content of news when compared with 2019. For authenticity the following quotes from respondents are presented as verbatim from the survey data.

"Obviously, the COVID-19 virus has been spread globally and taken many lives so to hear how bad it is and how it is taking those innocent lives, every day, makes me feel worse than last year".

- ".. all the terrible things that happened this year and it just keeps getting worse. Its not very nice hearing the things that people have died or something is going to happen that might kill a bunch of people"
- ".. i think this is not what they say it is, nobody i know is sick, nobody understands why the news keeps saying we have to get a needle to avoid the flu, but dont understand why."

The manner in which Covid-19 has been reported in the media and how it has taken over other issues also surfaced as a cause of concern for some.

"Covid 19 has resulted in a plethora of false information- particularly as a result of China's cover up of the virus. This increasing bias has made me extremely frustrated"

"COVID-19 has taken over the media, and is the most popular news story run. Due to this, the news that showed positive stories were filtered out."

"With all that has been going on this year, a lot of the focus on climate change has gone (there wasn't much in the first place) this is very dangerous, because this means that the government have been able to let adani get their mine without being challenged much for it at all because of covid 19."

"We had a virus planedemic which the media controlled a narrative. Much misinformation and lies. Lockdowns killed people, left them without jobs and bankrupted their businesses... Many kids missing school. A virus with a 99.7% survival rate..."

"There has been a lot of fake news a lot of stress and not getting the facts right. Some of the panic buying and other things that have occurred are unnecessary and have mainly happened due to the media. They also have not shown the effects that covid has on families and people well enough. If people were more informed on facts and not fears that would be better."

"Way too much fear, propaganda and false news stories. I will never watch the news again after this year as I cannot trust them to report the truth."

Apart from Covid-19, other events that have occurred in 2020 were cited as reasons why the content of news has made people feel worse than they did in 2019. Bushfires, floods, the US election, the Black Lives Matter Movement and police brutality around the world, were all mentioned.

"Obviously there has been negative parts of our world that have been exposed this year through the BLM movement and the US election happening later this week and its all negative but well needed".

"I feel like the way the news explains things can degrade the all seriousness of the matter. such as the BLM protests instead of explaining and showing why the protests are happening and how many of them are peaceful. many news about the BLM movement was about to looting."

Overall, many young Australians who responded to the survey suggested that the presentation of negative events in the news made them feel worse off compared to last year. Terrifying news, perceived exaggerated reporting, false information and scare tactics were all attributed to making young Australians feel worse off. Many young people expressed that there is hardly any representation of positive and good news in the media. As one respondent put it: "most of the news was bad news about covid, police brutality,

American election etc. These things are very important but everyone needs at least a short break from them."

"I think the news sometimes exaggerates bad things and doesn't talk enough about good news. we need more good news stories. young designers, creators, innovators and international trends would appeal to a broader younger audience."

Making news work better for young people

The survey asked young people how news could be made better for young Australians.

Most responses to this question focused on making the news **more accessible, relevant,** and understandable for young people. Use of stories that are relatable and are of appeal to young people was a recurring suggestion in the responses. One respondent said,

"I think it could be simplified so that younger Australians can read It and know what is happening to them or what is going on in the place they live in so they can have knowledge of the world around them in a form that is a little easier for them to understand. (:"

Another response suggested,

"make it more interesting by using modern language and personal stories more often. News corporations should heavily fact check everything they publish as young people are very impressionable. Make language more understandable and stories more relevant."

In addition to this, the second most recurring response was **concerned with reliability and perceived biased representations in the news**. Many young Australians expressed concern about news bias, with a number of respondents noting that bias leads to the circulation of misinformation and creates confusion. Many respondents thought that by "avoiding creating fake news" and focusing "more facts- less exaggeration", the news could be made better for young people. One of the respondents said, "the news would be better if they stopped trying to brainwash people with lies and exaggerated stories."

According to another respondent,

"...there is no integrity in journalism. The real subjects, real truth don't get reported on. This has got to stop, there is no credibility in the media in Australia."

Yet another suggestion to make news better for young Australians was to include more positive, safe and entertaining news rather than negative, worrying and scary content all the time. One respondent suggested news media can be "not based on fear but positive news!!!". Another respondent suggested news should be more entertaining:

"News could be made better for young Australians by making the information somewhat funny to intrigue the young AUS audience, doing this could keep the kids hooked on the news, but it is also plotting knowledge in their brain."

An interesting suggestion was to **make news available to all young Australians in schools**. As one respondent simply said, "tell us at school". Another respondent noted, "I don't look at the news very often because my family doesn't so if we looked in school or if reliable news was on safari home page". Another response suggested: "it should be pushed, it should be a normal part of a school day. Lots of kids don't even know the current political standpoints of Australia in 2020".

Many respondents urged news media organisations to **involve more young Australians in the news** and to let them have a voice in order to ensure fairer representation and as a way to include their concerns and in this way make news more relevant to them. Some young Australians thought having young people report and write the news would be a good way to make news better for young Australians. Others suggested channels, podcasts, news apps and websites could be designed specifically for and by young people.

"More representation for young Australians in news, in order to make youth more aware of what is happening in the world, as well as involve their ideas and views in the news."

"Include younger people, include things that we may understand, relate to or even care about."

"Appeal to young Australians by giving young Australians a voice."

"News could be made better for young Australians by having people of our own age or even with our opinions and perspectives to make it more reliable and fair because I feel we haven't been given much of a voice in our current society."

Some of the responses also explained why they believe better representation of young people is needed in the Australian news media today.

"The news is always from the point of view of adults and they should get kids point of view because it's obvious we are going to have different opinions that will bring light to whatever is happening."

"The news industry in Australia is dominated by adult politicians and journalists which can lead to a young audience like myself being disengaged. Having said that I believe there needs to be more representation of younger Australians in the industry. Young people use social media as an outlet to connect with others so placing more reliable news targeted at a younger audience on social media would allow young people to gain a knowledge of international and national events and issues."

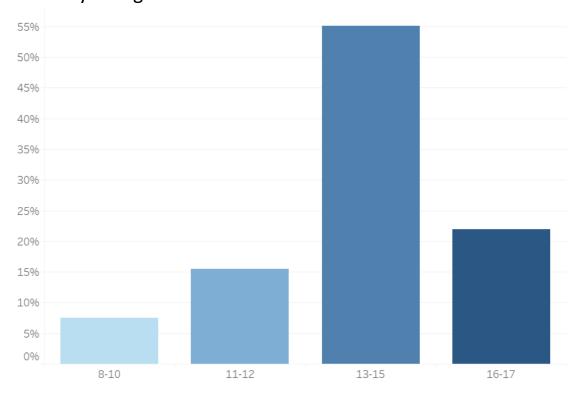
In addition to the appeal to include young people in the news, there were also responses that pointed towards **representing and including concerns of diverse and minority groups** in Australia. It was suggested by some of the respondents that by making more attention to diverse groups "especially people of colour in Australia" and "including a diverse range of youth voices such as multicultural perspectives, various genders, and abilities" the news could be made better for young people. One respondent suggested: "there could be more things for and about people of colour an LGBTQ+ … let us see all perspectives in the one place".

Lastly, around 20% of the total respondents to this question said they either did not know or were not sure how the news could be made better. Only a few respondents said they thought the news is good the way it is or that it does not need to be changed.

The survey respondents

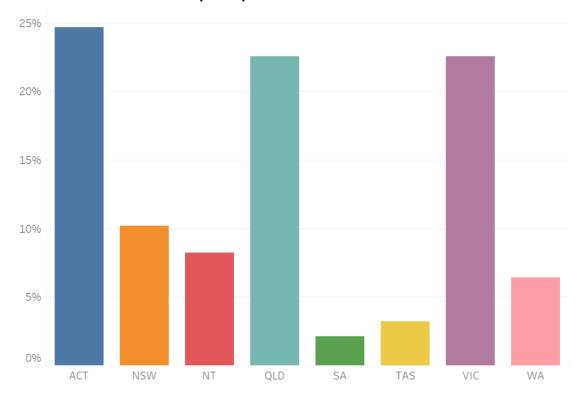
More than half the respondents (55%) were between 13-15 years of age, 22% were between 16-17 years, 15% were between years 11-12 and 8% were between 8-10 years.

What is your age?



The respondents live in every state and territory in Australia, although there were a higher number of responses (25%) than is representative of the population size from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and New South Wales was underrepresented in terms of survey responses (10% of responses) given the relative population size, as was South Australia (2% of responses).

What state or territory do you live in most of the time?



Author and acknowledgements

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https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/medialiteracy/about/news champions forum

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