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DIGITAL NEWS REPORT:
AUSTRALIA 2017

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DIGITAL NEWS REPORT:
AUSTRALIA 2017

by Jerry Watkins, Sora Park, Caroline Fisher, R. Warwick Blood, Glen Fuller, Virginia Haussegger, Michael Jensen, Jee Young Lee and Franco Papandrea.

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FOREWORD

Jerry Watkins
Director, News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra
Lead author, *Digital News Report: Australia 2017*

At time of writing, the Australian terrestrial TV player TEN Network faces financial insolvency. Although current speculation suggests that TEN will continue operation following significant restructure, this level of uncertainty in a major media brand is clearly unsettling for the sector. Meanwhile Fairfax Media continues as the subject of a possible takeover by a private equity firm and the repercussions for Fairfax print and online news brands remain unclear.

These kinds of challenges to established broadcast and print brands underline the ongoing impact of digital disruption on the content business, including news. Indeed the TV 'set' is dying rapidly, replaced either by a monitor, console and/or a smart device with access to Foxtel, NetFlix, Stan, YouTube or others. As a result 'appointment TV' itself is dying alongside the TV set.

Nevertheless this year's *Digital News Report: Australia 2017* finds that **terrestrial TV remains the main source of news for Australians**. According to our data, 26% of respondents indicated that TV news bulletins were their main source of news, well above social (16%) and newspaper sites/apps (13%). Since we know that news is often consumed across multiple platforms, we also asked respondents about all the ways they had accessed news in the week prior to our survey: 50% had accessed news via TV bulletins, slightly above social at 46% and clearly ahead of all other platforms. But when we look more closely, the shape of things to come is quite clear. **Digital is the preferred news space for the under-35 years old** and our data confirm that this segment prefers either online or social over TV for news access.

Whichever platform Australians prefer to consume news from, the fact remains that we also prefer not to pay for our news content. In our *Paying for Online News* section, Franco Papandrea suggests that "The growth of free online sources of news is turning paid news into a niche product". Richard Bean from the Australian Communications and Media Authority makes a timely reminder in his commentary that "the reluctance of Australians to pay for digital *news* can be contrasted with their attitude to digital *entertainment*" to the extent that at December 2016, 30% of Australians had subscribed to a video-on-demand service.

So both broadcast and print players are under pressure while few of us pay for news (whether traditional or digital). What of news content itself?

In 2017 the **fake news** phenomenon remains current alongside the issue of lack of trust in news. In her commentary for this year's *Report*, Natasha Eves from SBS raises some of the wider problems caused by fake news production and consumption, as well as some possible responses by media organisations. Karen Barlow from *HuffPost Australia* goes as far at to declare that "Fake news, as an accusation, cannot be trusted" in her commentary piece for us. In our new section on *Following Politicians on Social Media*, Caroline Fisher takes a slightly different approach to the fake news phenomenon by investigating those politicians who are using social networks (particularly Facebook) to bypass traditional news media and communicate directly – and in some cases very effectively – with their audiences. A leading practitioner in this new form of disintermediated political communication, the Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP, shares his own insights and experiences in his commentary.

Our special section this year is on *Gender and News* and we believe that this is the first time that gender has been analysed in this detail by any of the 36 territories participating in the wider *Digital News Report* project. Virginia Haussegger, Mike Jensen and Pia Rowe examine how gender effects where we consume news as well as the reasons that we avoid news. In her commentary to this section, Jaqueline Maley from *The Sydney Morning Herald* suggests that it is "only recently that publishers have realised they must tailor their journalism to follow women"; everything that our survey data reveal to us about the future health of Australian news brands in a fragmented multi-platform environment alongside the death of appointment TV would support this view.

As ever, my thanks to all our guest contributors and especially to the *Digital News Report: Australia* team here at the News & Media Research Centre. Our 2017 Report is our biggest yet and it has taken an incredible effort by the team to make sense of the complex behaviours and choices of the Australian news consumer.

ABOUT

Welcome to the *Digital News Report: Australia 2017*, the third annual survey of its kind of news consumption in Australia. This report is a collaboration between the News and Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra and the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. The Australian survey is part of a wider project with 36 participating territories.

2017 PARTICIPATING TERRITORIES

Argentina
Australia
Austria
Belgium
Brazil (urban)
Canada
Chile
Croatia
Czech Republic
Denmark
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Hong Kong
Hungary
Ireland
Italy
Japan
Korea, South
Malaysia
Mexico
Netherlands
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Singapore
Slovakia
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Taiwan
Turkey
UK
USA

METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted by the market research and data company YouGov plc between late January and early February 2017. An online interview was administered to members of the YouGov plc panel of individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. An email was sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample according to the sample definition, inviting them to take part in the survey and providing a link to the survey.

YouGov plc normally achieves a response rate of between 35% and 50% to surveys, however, this does vary dependent upon the subject matter, complexity and length of the questionnaire. A quota based on Australian Bureau of Statistics census data was set using gender, age and region. Any respondent who said that they had not consumed any news in the past month was filtered from the results to ensure that irrelevant responses did not impact data quality.

Total starting sample size	2,202 including non-news users
Total number of non-news users removed	198
% of non-news users removed	9.0%
Final sample size	2,004 adults who access news once a month or more

Core questions were asked in all 36 territories in order to provide an international comparison. The questionnaire and the overall project methodology were consistent across all territories. A number of questionnaire themes were refreshed in 2017 including:

- News avoidance: the frequency and reasoning behind such behaviours.
- Payment: what non-news digital media are paid for; likelihood of paying for news in the next 12 months; barriers to paying for news.
- Fake news: distinguishing fact from fiction; which online sources are considered best for attributes.
- Gateways to news: social media, search engines and aggregators being a gateway to news sources.
- Political news: whether friends share political views, whether follow politicians or parties to the left or right and confidence in political participation.

All data in this report were provided by YouGov plc. The data were weighted further to reflect the Australian adult population based on census data with regard to age, gender and region. Australian data were cleaned by the News & Media Research Centre unless otherwise stated. Due to differences in the size and composition of the survey recruitment panel in 2015 compared to successive years, any comparison with 2015 data should remain tentative.

The *Digital News Report: Australia 2017* is an online survey and we might expect the results to under-represent the consumption habits of those who are not online news users, typically older and/or less affluent people. A fuller description of the global survey methodology can be found on the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism site www.digitalnewsreport.org.

RESEARCH TEAM

R. Warwick Blood is an authority in risk communication and the reporting of health issues such as suicide, mental illness, obesity and influenza. He has conducted research in these areas for government departments including the Department of Health and Ageing, the Australian National Council on Drugs, and for *beyondblue*. He is co-founder of the Australian Health News Research Collaboration.

Megan Deas is editor of the Communication & Media collection of *Analysis and Policy Observatory*. She will shortly take up the role of editor of the gender equality blog *BroadAgenda*, hosted by the 50/50 by 2030 Foundation at the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis (IGPA), University of Canberra.

Caroline Fisher researches political public relations and the intersection between journalism and public relations. She won the *Excellence in Journalism Research* grant from the Journalism Education & Research Association of Australia (JERAA) in 2015. She is a former reporter for ABC News and media adviser to former Queensland Premier Anna Bligh.

Glen Fuller conducts research at the intersection of media, technology and culture. His focus is the role of specialist media in scenes and the relation between media and enthusiasm (affect), both in the context of technology, experience and the shifting composition of relations. Other research interests include journalism and media industry innovation, and discourse and media events.

Virginia Haussegger AM is an award-winning journalist, author and social commentator. She has reported for Australia's leading current affairs programs on Channel 9, the 7 Network and the ABC. The former presenter of the ABC TV News in Canberra, she is Adjunct Professor and Director of the 50/50 by 2030 Foundation at the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra.

Michael J Jensen is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis. He has a background in political communication and has published books concerning online political behaviour. His work concerns the use of digital communication technologies in the development of new forms of political organization within political campaigning and protest movements.

Jee Young Lee is a doctoral researcher at the News & Media Research Centre. Her work focuses on policy issues and digital environments. Her PhD thesis explores a user-centric inclusion framework for a digitalised society and the role of digital divide policy in addressing exclusion.

Franco Papandrea is an established expert on communication and media policy, and media economics. He is the author of the 2013 report *State of the Newspaper Industry in Australia*. He advised the two foremost Australian public inquiries into newspapers: the House of Representatives Select Committee on the Print Media 1991, and the Independent Inquiry into Media and Media Regulation 2011.

Sora Park's research focuses on digital media, media markets and media policy. She has written widely on the economics of television, newspaper markets and other information industries. She has extensive experience in policy research and consultancy on digital media in South Korea and has led various private sector consultancies for major internet and media companies such as KBS, NHN Corp and MBC.

Pia Rowe is a co-editor of the gender equality blog *BroadAgenda*. She recently completed her PhD at the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis, University of Canberra. Her research focuses on inclusive notions of politics and feminism, focusing on issues normally considered as social and non-political.

Jerry Watkins is Director of the News & Media Research Centre. He has over 20 years' high-profile international experience in communication strategy and has led major projects for some of the world's biggest telecoms companies. Jerry's research expertise is in mobile, social and online content and devices and their impact on people and systems. He has served as an Invited Expert on Mobile Media for UNESCO.

NEWS MOMENTS OF 2017

TUESDAY MAY 30: Clinton Pryor is photographed during his Walk for Justice from Perth to Canberra in protest of the forced closure of Aboriginal communities. Mr Pryor left Perth last September, walking north-east towards Uluru, down through South Australia via Adelaide. He is calling for Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to allow indigenous elders to take control of their communities, because "community life is very important, it's controlled by elders in the old, traditional way".

IMAGE: AAP/CLINTON'S WALK FOR JUSTICE © 2017 AAP

1 KEY FINDINGS

DIGITAL NEWS CONSUMPTION IN AUSTRALIA

SORA PARK

Interest in news **remains strong with about 63% of participants saying they were extremely or very interested in news – a figure consistent with our 2016 survey.**

- **'News about my region, city or town' was rated with the highest level of interest, followed by 'international news' and then 'news about crime, justice and security'.**
- **Younger news consumers are more interested in softer news such as entertainment/celebrity news, arts/culture news, and weird news.**

Social**: 39% of respondents use Facebook to get news, with 15% using YouTube. But 41% of respondents said they didn't use any of the social media brands listed in our survey for news consumption.**

Lack of trust **in news: Australians tend to trust the news they consume (48%) more so than they trust news in general (42%). There are a large number of people who neither trust nor distrust the news they use (33%).**

TV news **continues to be the main source of news for Australian audiences overall. But preference for the main source varies across age groups:**

- **38% of 18-24 year olds use social.**
- **32% of 25-34 year olds use online.**
- **50% of 65+ year olds and 45% of 55-64 year olds use TV.**

WHERE DO AUSTRALIANS GET NEWS FROM?

About a quarter of Australian news consumers cited television as their main source of news, followed by social media (16%) and websites or apps of newspapers (13%). When asked whether they had accessed each platform in the past week, 50% said they watched TV news, 46% used social media for news, and 36% listened to radio news (**Figure 1.1**). Mainstream brands continue to be most accessed: ABC News, Channels 7, 9 and TEN news were the most consumed traditional news media, while News.com.au, ABC News Online, nine.com.au, and Yahoo!7 were the most accessed online platforms.

FIGURE 1.1: NEWS ACCESSED IN THE LAST WEEK AND MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS (%)
Q3. Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news? Please select all that apply.
Q4. You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your MAIN source of news?

Women are higher in their preference for TV news (41%) than men (34%). Men tend to access online news (32%) more than women (22%). Older age groups (35+ years) tend to prefer TV, radio and newspaper. Younger groups (18-34 years) tend to be more diversified in their choice of platforms and prefer online and social media. 38% of 18-24 year olds use social media as their main source of news, followed by 28% for online news and 25% for TV. 32% of 25-34 year olds cite online news, 28% TV and 25% social media as their main news source. In contrast 50% of 65+ year olds and 45% of 55-64 year olds say TV is the main source of news. 14% of respondents over 55 years old say their main source is social media (**Figure 1.2**).

FIGURE 1.2: MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS BY AGE (%)

Age was also an important factor in defining which device people use to access news. Computers were used more commonly among older generations while younger generations predominantly used mobile phones to access news. In the older age brackets, tablets are used more than smartphones, suggesting that large screens favoured by these age groups (**Figure 1.3**).

FIGURE 1.3: HOW WE ACCESS NEWS BY AGE (%)
Q8b. Which, if any, of the following devices have you used to access news in the last week? Please select all that apply.

Survey respondents were given a list of news brand, both traditional (TV, newspaper, radio) and online (both traditional and digital born brands) and were asked which ones they had used in the past week. Among offline news media (TV, newspaper, radio), 14% of the respondents said they only used one of them, 22% used two, 18% used three, 16% used four, and 30% used five or more news brands. In contrast 28% of news consumers only used one online brand for news, 21% used two, 18% three, 11% four and 22% used five or more brands (**Figure 1.4**).

FIGURE 1.4: NUMBER OF NEWS SOURCES ACCESSED IN THE LAST WEEK (%)
Q5a. Which of the following brands have you used to access news offline in the last week (via TV, radio, print, and other traditional media)? Please select all that apply.
Q5b. Which of the following brands have you used to access news online in the last week (via websites, apps, social media, and other forms of Internet access)? Please select all that apply.

IN WHICH TYPES OF NEWS ARE AUSTRALIANS INTERESTED?

Respondents were asked to rate how interested they were in different types of news using a five-point Likert-type scale. Interest in news remains strong with about 63% of participants saying they were extremely or very interested in news – a figure consistent with our 2016 survey.

On a five-point scale, 'news about my region, city or town' was rated with the highest interest at 3.78, followed by international news (3.74) and news about crime, justice and security (3.55). 'Entertainment and celebrity news' was rated of lowest interest at 2.69. 'Weird news' category was asked for the first time in this year's survey yielding a result of 3.09, which is rated in eighth place among 12 news topics (**Table 1.1**).

Younger news consumers are more interested in softer news such as entertainment/celebrity news, arts/culture news, and weird news compared to older consumers who prefer more formal types of news such as international, political, economics, and health.

TYPE	N	MEAN	SD
News about my region, city or town	1975	3.78	0.92
International news	1981	3.74	0.94
News about crime, justice and security	1982	3.55	0.97
Health or education news	1985	3.48	0.97
Science and technology news	1983	3.43	1.02
Political news	1980	3.23	1.18
Lifestyle news (e.g. food, fashion, travel)	1983	3.13	1.05
Weird news (e.g. funny, bizarre, quirky)	1979	3.09	1.04
Business and economic news	1978	3.08	1.11
Arts and culture news	1982	2.85	1.06
Sports news	1980	2.85	1.38
Entertainment and celebrity news	1981	2.69	1.15

TABLE 1.1: INTEREST IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF NEWS
Q2_new2016. How interested are you in the following types of news? Extremely interested, Very interested, Somewhat interested, Not very interested, Not at all interested, Don't know.

Online news discovery differed across age groups. 37% of 18-24 year olds come across news via social media. This group was also using a news reader or app that integrates news links (11%) more than any other age group (**Figure 1.5**). Compared to other age groups, younger consumers (25-34 and 35-44 years) preferred to search a keyword or website to get news. This indicates that they have preferred brands and wish to get news from a particular news source but do not always memorise the URL.

FIGURE 1.5: METHOD OF ACCESSING NEWS ONLINE (%)

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.

WHAT IS ONLINE NEWS GOOD FOR?

When asked what online news were good for, ABC News online ranked the top in 'providing accurate and reliable news (15%)', 'helping me understand complex issues (12%)', and 'providing strong viewpoints or opinions (11%). On the other hand, Nine.com.au ranked the highest in providing 'amusing or entertaining' news (10%) (**Figure 1.6**).

FIGURE 1.6: QUALITIES OF ONLINE NEWS (%)
Q5c_2017. You say you use the following brands for online news. In your experience, which of these is best for: Providing accurate and reliable news; Helping me understand complex issues; Providing strong viewpoints/opinions; Amusing or entertaining me.

When consuming news online, most respondents either read news in text (33.4%) or mostly read with occasional video viewing (34.3%). Only 2.8% said they watch video news only and 5.9% mostly watch video with some text. While TV is the most popular method of accessing news, which is video content, when online, most people prefer text-based news.

Online news consumption behaviour was different by age group, and by the device people use to access news. The youngest age group, 18-24, consumed more video-based news (13.8%) than any other age groups. Mobile users (8.5%) tend to watch more videos compared to computer users (7.6%) (**Figure 1.7**).

FIGURE 1.7: ONLINE NEWS HABITS BY AGE AND DEVICE (%)
OPTQ11d. In thinking about your online news habits, which of the following statements applies best to you? Please select one: I mostly read news in text; I mostly read news in text but occasionally watch video news that looks interesting; I read text stories and watch video news about the same; I mostly watch video news and read text occasionally; I mostly watch video news; Don't know.

Some social media platforms are used more for news than others. Of the respondents, 68% were using Facebook and 39% were using Facebook to get news. Another 8% of respondents said that Facebook Messenger was their main source of news and 7.5% used WhatsApp to get news.

This indicates that people get news from people they know via these platforms. About 15% of the respondents said they use YouTube for news and 8% used Twitter for news. However 41% said they didn't use any of the social media platforms listed in our survey for news consumption.

Those who think of Twitter as a useful way of coming across news are mostly younger. Older Facebook users (45+) are mostly coming across news on the platform when they are doing other things (See section 4: *Social discovery of news*).

FIGURE 1.8: SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NEWS (%)
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.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS NEWS

News consumers tend to trust the news they consume (48%) more so than they trust news in general (42%). However there are a large number of people who neither trust nor distrust the news they use (33%).

When correlated with the number of brands news consumers access and trust, the more brands they access the higher the trust in both general trust in news (Pearson's r= .105, p<0.01) and trust in news they consume (Pearson's r= .1.6, p<0.01). Diversity in news sources is positively related to the trust level of the news consumer. Australian news consumers believe that news media are mostly independent from political or government influence (40%) but less free from commercial influence (28%) – see **Figure 1.9**.

FIGURE 1.9: TRUST IN NEWS & BELIEF IN INDEPENDENCE (%)

Q6_2016. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: I think you can trust most news most of the time; I think I can trust most of the news I consume most of the time; Strongly disagree, Tend to disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Tend to agree, Strongly agree.

Q6_2016b. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: The news media in my country is independent from undue political or government influence most of the time; The news media in my country is independent from undue business or commercial influence most of the time; Strongly disagree, Tend to disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Tend to agree, Strongly agree.

27% BELIEVE SOCIAL MEDIA HELPS THEM DISTINGUISH FACT FROM FICTION.
40% THINK TRADITIONAL NEWS MEDIA ARE BETTER AT THIS.
OVER TWO-THIRDS OF PEOPLE THINK THAT NEITHER TRADITIONAL NEWS MEDIA NOR SOCIAL MEDIA HELP THEM DISTINGUISH FACT FROM FICTION (**FIGURE 1.10**)

FIGURE 1.10: FACT VERSUS FICTION (%)

Q6_2017. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. The news media does a good job in helping me distinguish fact from fiction. Social media does a good job in helping me distinguish fact from fiction. Strongly disagree, Tend to disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Tend to agree, Strongly agree.

DO AUSTRALIANS AVOID NEWS?

We asked respondents if they try to avoid news and 56% said they occasionally or often try to avoid the news. The reasons of avoiding news were different between male and female news consumers. Women were more likely to find that the news is upsetting and has a negative effect on their mood. The second common reason was that they didn't believe they could rely on news to be true (32%) and this applied to both men and women (**Figure 1.11**). When we examine each age group within gender, an interesting pattern emerges. For younger age groups (under 35), men are more likely to avoid news compared to women, whereas women aged 65+ are more likely to avoid news than men in the same age bracket (**Figure 1.12**).

FIGURE 1.11: REASONS FOR AVOIDING NEWS (% OF ALL RESPONDENTS)
Q1dii_2017. You said that you find yourself trying to avoid news. Which, if any, of the following are reasons why you actively try to avoid news? Please select all that apply: It can have a negative effect on my mood; Graphic images upset me; It disturbs my ability to concentrate on more important things; It consumes too much of my time; It leads to arguments I'd rather avoid; I can't rely on news to be true; I don't feel there is anything I can do about it; Other; Don't know.

FIGURE 1.12: NEWS AVOIDERS BY AGE AND GENDER (%)
Q1di_2017. Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid news these days? Avoid= Often, Sometimes, Occasionally. Do not avoid= Never. Excluded 'don't know' responses.

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

About 90% of the respondents in this survey accessed the internet more than once a day and 52% accessed news more than once a day. About 15% of respondents accessed news more than five times a day.

Younger, more educated and higher income news consumers tend to access the internet more frequently. In case of news consumption, the more educated and the higher income consumers are heavy news users. However – when age is factored in – a different pattern emerges. Younger generations are divided into very frequent versus infrequent news consumers.

About 20% of 18-24 years olds and 23% of 25-34 year olds access news more than 5 times a day, indicating that there are heavy news consumers among young people.

On the other hand, there are infrequent news consumers - 27% in 18-24 group - within that age group that say they access news less than once a day. Whereas with older populations, the majority are moderate consumers of news where in the age group 45-54, 37% and 55-64 age group, 48% say they consume news 2 to 5 times a day (**Figure 1.13**).

FIGURE 1.13: NEWS CONSUMPTION BY AGE GROUP (%)

Q1b_new. Typically, how often do you access news? By news we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper or online).
More than 5 times a day= More than 10 times a day, Between 6 and 10 times a day; Between 2 and 5 times a day; Once a day; Less than once a day = 4-6 days a week, 2-3 days a week, Once a week, Less often than once a week, Less often than once a month, Never.

COMMENTARY

A BRITISH VIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

David A L Levy
Director, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford

For a British person looking at the Australian media, the first impression is one of familiarity. But the differences between the Australian and British media landscapes are more striking than might at first appear. First there is News Corporation's presence, which is far greater than in the UK – accounting for nearly 60% of daily press circulation – and helps make Australia the most concentrated media market in the world[1]. The company's website (news.com.au) occupies the top place in the online news brands used weekly by Australian survey respondents but four other Murdoch-controlled titles[2] also feature prominently in the list of online news brands – collectively dwarfing the three[3] provided by their nearest competitor, Fairfax Media.

Second there is the ABC, which is similar to the BBC but much smaller and less well funded, with correspondingly less reach and more competition. ABC News's weekly offline reach of 39% put it in first place with its 22% weekly use online placing it just behind news.com.au, but these compare with the BBC's 67% weekly use in broadcast and 47% online.

Third, much of the coverage in the Australian media, particularly in the press and on radio, feels even more polarised than that in the UK, with a culture war underway around key issues such as climate change, Indigenous rights, and asylum seekers – making common ground difficult. Polarisation may help explain the low trust figures for Australia; overall trust in news in Australia is quite low, at 42%, just 1% below the UK[4] but the surprise is that Australians trust in the news *they use* is not much higher, at 48% compared to 51% for the UK.

Fourth, while Brits may think Australia feels distant, the Australian news market is permeated by a host of international online players with good scores both for US-based pure players such as *HuffPost Australia* (11%), *Buzzfeed* (8%), and *Vice News* (3%) and for legacy players online such as BBC News online (11%), CNN.com (8%), *The Guardian* (8%) and *The New York Times* (6%). In part this reflects Australians' keen interest in international news[5] and that new players like Vice and Buzzfeed provide content designed to appeal to a younger audience.

Inroads by international providers feed into our fifth observation, namely the serious economic pressures affecting the Australian press. These are worse than those in the UK, with downsizing both at News Corp and more so at Fairfax Media which is sacking over one hundred staff, has abolished separate editors for its big city newspapers in Melbourne and Sydney, and is up for sale at the time of writing.

While polarisation and low trust figures are worrying they may also help boost audiences for some Australian digital-born start-ups, with very reasonable weekly usage figures both for The Conversation (4%) and Crikey (2%), which is behind a hard paywall. The same factors may also explain an increase in paying for online news, from 10% in 2016 to 13% in 2017, compared to 16% in the USA and just 6% in the UK.

Interestingly 25% of those paying for online news in Australia say their primary motivation is to 'help fund journalism'[6] and there are relatively high levels of donations for news in Australia[7]. For these people at least there is a strong affinity with their chosen news sources, as well as an awareness of the precariousness of commercially funded news and a willingness to do something about it. That will be an important factor in securing the future of commercially funded news in Australia.

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1 theconversation.com/factcheck-is-australias-level-of-media-ownership-concentration-one-of-the-highest-in-the-world-68437. The Australian government is proposing a relaxation of some ownership rules.
2 The Murdoch-controlled sites are news.com.au (24%), heraldsun.com.au (10%), dailytelegraph.com.au (9%), theaustralian.com.au (9%) and couriermail.com.au (6%).
3 smh.com.au (14%), theage.com.au (11%) and afr.com (5%).
4 Trust in news in general was much greater in the UK than Australia in 2016, but overall trust in the UK dropped by roughly 7 percentage points, possibly in the wake of the polarising Brexit debate.
5 Which comes second in the list of Australian respondents' most favoured types of news just after news about my region/city.
6 Compared to just 17% of the much lower number of those paying for online news in the UK.
7 Up from 1% in 2016 to 3% in 2017, compared to 4% in the USA this year.

Dr David Levy has been RISJ Director since September 2008. As Director he has an overview of all the Institute's activities. Before joining the Institute, he was Controller, Public Policy at the BBC, where he led the BBC's policy for the Charter Review and was in charge of public policy & regulation.

NEWS MOMENTS OF 2017

THURSDAY MAY 25: Environmental activists voice their opposition to Indian miner Adani's proposed Carmichael coal mine, outside Parliament House in Brisbane. The protesters called on the Queensland government to block a billion-dollar federal loan to Adani.

IMAGE: AAP/DAN PELED © 2017 AAP

2 AUSTRALIA BY COMPARISON

JERRY WATKINS

In 2017 the *Digital News Report* survey was conducted in 36 territories, up from 26 in 2016. We are particularly pleased to welcome new Asia Pacific territories this year in the shape of Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan. These new entrants provide valuable opportunities to compare Australian news consumption more closely with its neighbours.

- In many territories there has been a percentage drop with regard to which brands are used to access online news. In Australia, respondents reported a big drop in access to news content via a print brand online (Figure 2.1).
- Australian respondents are the only ones from a basket of ten territories who prefer digital born or digital first brands for 'accurate and reliable news' over broadcast or print brands (Table 2.1).
- When asked whether "social media does a good job in helping me distinguish fact from fiction" Australian respondents under 35 year olds showed a comparatively high level of agreement (32%) compared to 24% of 35+ year olds. Respondents in Greece preferred social media to news media for helping them distinguish fact from fiction (Figure 2.4).
- For those content entrepreneurs who are willing and able to respond to the demand for soft news from online, mobile or social digital news consumers, the Asia Pacific region is likely to continue to provide significant rewards (Figure 2.2).

MOST-ACCESSED NEWS BRANDS, BY TYPE

Throughout this year's survey, a digital-born or digital-first brand is defined as either (a) a brand that did not have a print or broadcasting legacy before it started to offer news online, or (b) a brand which is pitched very differently to its legacy equivalent, or (c) a brand whose digital news output is now much more important than its legacy roots. Five Asia Pacific territories feature on a longer list which indicates a preference for consuming news via either a digital-born or digital-first news brand in 2017: these are Australia, urban Brazil, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Poland, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia and USA. In 2016 respondents in Australia, Japan, Korea and Poland all rated digital-born brands for news access more highly than broadcast or print and we see this preference continuing in 2017.

FIGURE 2.1: MOST-ACCESSED NEWS BRANDS, BY TYPE (%)
Q5b. Which of the following brands have you used to access news **online** in the last week (via **websites, apps, social media, and other forms of Internet access**)? Please select all that apply.
Base: Total sample in each country.

The bigger picture is shown in **Figure 2.1**. In response to the question '*Which of the following brands have you used to access news online in the last week?*' many territories recorded a percentage drop in brand preferences across broadcast, print and digital-born.

The drop in access via broadcast is noticeable in Japan (down 17%) and Korea (down 16%). Australian respondents report a sharp drop in access via print (down 17%). USA reports an increase in preference for digital-born brands (up 3%). It is difficult to assess the reasons for the drop in access – we might speculate that the popularity of social as a news platform might be one cause, but our data from Australian respondents this year only support this for the younger age segments.

TV remains the preferred platform for news access by older age segments. Neither can we attribute preference for digital-born brands with internet penetration rates. Although Australia, Japan and Korea report relatively high internet penetration (>91%), Poland's penetration rate is relatively low (73%) yet Polish respondents report a higher preference for news access via digital-born brands (84%) over broadcast (64%) and print (66%) brands.

AUSTRALIAN SURVEY RESPONDENTS REPORT A SHARP DROP IN NEWS ACCESS VIA PRINT (DOWN 17%)

PREFERRED CONTENT

Based on which online brands they used for accessing news in the week prior to the survey, respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought their most-accessed brands were best for:

- 'Helping me understand complex issues'
- 'Providing strong viewpoints/opinions'
- 'Amusing or entertaining me'.

Table 2.1 indicates that in all territories except Spain, digital-born news brands are considered best for news which 'amused or entertained'. Respondents in European countries prefer print brands for accuracy, complexity and strong viewpoints whereas Canada, UK and USA prefer to access news via TV brands. Australian respondents are the only ones from the basket of ten territories who prefer digital brands for 'accurate and reliable news'.

These stated preferences paint a confused picture for us in 2017. Both the Australian and global survey in 2017 confirm that TV remains the most popular platform for news consumption. Yet **Table 2.1** indicates that respondents in Australia, France, Germany, Italy and Spain do not rate TV news brands as their top preference in any of the listed criteria. We shall continue to monitor this trend closely in future surveys.

AUSTRALIAN RESPONDENTS ARE THE ONLY ONES FROM THE TEN SELECTED TERRITORIES WHO PREFER DIGITAL BRANDS FOR 'ACCURATE AND RELIABLE NEWS'

TABLE 2.1: PREFERRED CONTENT, BY BRAND TYPE
Q5c _ 2017. You say you use the following brands for online news. In your experience, which of these is best for ...
NOTE – Broadcaster is including PSB
Base: Online users of brands.

For those content entrepreneurs who are willing and able to respond to the demand for amusing/entertaining content shown by online, mobile or social digital news consumers, the Asia Pacific region is likely to continue to provide significant rewards. Respondents in all territories were asked in which types of news they are interested.

Their responses were categorised as:

- 'Hard' news: business and economics, education, health, international, political
- 'Soft' news: arts/culture, celebrity, entertainment, lifestyle, sport, weird.

FIGURE 2.2: HARD VS. SOFT NEWS (% PREFERENCE)
Q2_new2016. How interested are you in the following types of news?
Segmented by interest in hard or soft news.

Based on this categorisation, **Figure 2.2** shows that respondents in all territories surveyed consume more hard news than soft in 2017. The Asia Pacific territories of Taiwan (37%), Japan (33%), Malaysia 30%), Korea (30%) and Hong Kong (29%) show the greatest preference for soft news.

It is interesting to speculate whether the very active news environment in South Korea at the time that the survey was administered (early 2017) – including the looming impeachment of President Park Geun-hye and a rise in cross-border tensions – may have had some impact on preference for hard vs. soft news; we shall review this in 2018.

AUSTRALIAN U35s ARE NOTICEABLY MORE INTERESTED IN SOFT NEWS OVER HARD COMPARED TO THEIR BRITISH COUNTERPARTS

The interest in hard vs. soft news does vary across age segments – rather unexpectedly, in some territories. **Figure 2.3** shows mean values for all ten territories represented, based on which the U35 age segment is more interested in soft news over hard – except for respondents in Germany and Korea, where both age segments express an equal interest in soft news.

The reverse is largely but not entirely the case for hard news, since the U35 age segment in both Italy and Spain is more interested in hard news than older respondents. Whereas British and Australian respondents have a very similar interest in hard news across age segments, Australian U35s are noticeably more interested in soft news over hard compared to their British counterparts.

IN NEARLY ALL TERRITORIES IN THIS YEAR'S SURVEY, LESS THAN HALF OF RESPONDENTS AGREED THAT "THE NEWS MEDIA DOES A GOOD JOB IN HELPING RESPONDENTS DISTINGUISH FACT FROM FICTION"

FIGURE 2.3: HARD VS. SOFT NEWS, BY AGE
Q2_new2016. How interested are you in the following types of news? Table of Means
Base: All markets 2017 – USA: 2269; Canada: 2000; Australia: 2004; UK: 2112; Germany: 2062; France: 2000; Italy: 2011; Spain: 2006; Japan: 2000; Korea: 2002.

FACT FROM FICTION

All respondents were asked whether they thought that the news media does "a good job in helping me distinguish fact from fiction" (see **Figure 2.4** below). A rather complex story emerges from the territories listed in **Table 2.2**. Canadian (54%) respondents over 35 years old are the only segments where over 50% of respondents agree that the news media does a good job in helping respondents distinguish fact from fiction.

In all other segments and territories listed, less than half of respondents agree with this. USA (19%) and Greece (14%) show the highest level of strong disagreement. The U35 age segment in Ireland and UK are significantly less likely than their 35+ year old counterparts to agree. Australian respondents are quite even in their level of agreement (35% of U35 year olds, 41% of 35+ year olds).

FIGURE 2.4: FACT FROM FICTION (% OF RESPONDENTS)
Q2_new2016. How interested are you in the following types of news? Table of Means
Base: All markets 2017 – USA: 2269; Canada: 2000; Australia: 2004; UK: 2112; Germany: 2062; France: 2000; Italy: 2011; Spain: 2006; Japan: 2000; Korea: 2002.

		AUS	SPA	FRA	GER	GRE	UK	CAN	USA
The news media does a good job in helping me distinguish fact from fiction	Net Agree	40	46	33	44	19	41	51	38
	U35 Agree	38	39	32	39	17	27	42	36
	35+ Agree	41	48	33	45	20	46	54	39
Social media does a good job in helping me distinguish fact from fiction	Net Agree	27	36	24	20	28	18	24	20
	U35 Agree	32	39	24	17	28	20	28	25
	35+ Agree	24	35	24	20	28	17	22	18

TABLE 2.2: FACT FROM FICTION, U35 vs 35+ (%)
Q2_new2016. How interested are you in the following types of news? Table of Means
Base: All markets 2017 – USA: 2269; Canada: 2000; Australia: 2004; UK: 2112; Germany: 2062; France: 2000; Italy: 2011; Spain: 2006; Japan: 2000; Korea: 2002.

Respondents were also asked whether social media does "a good job in helping me distinguish fact from fiction", to which the U35 age segment in Australia, Canada, Spain, UK and USA were more likely to agree compared to the 35+ segment in these territories (see **Table 2.2**).

The difference between age segments was most marked in Australia, where 32% of U35 year olds agree with the good job that social media was doing compared to 24% of 35+ year olds. Respondents in USA (29%) have the highest level of disagreement.

Very interestingly, more respondents in Greece agree that social media does a good job in helping them distinguish fact from fiction (28%) compared to news media (19%)

MORE RESPONDENTS IN GREECE AGREE THAT SOCIAL MEDIA DOES A GOOD JOB IN HELPING THEM DISTINGUISH FACT FROM FICTION (28%) COMPARED TO NEWS MEDIA (19%)

	AUS	JPN	KOR	SPA	ITA	UK	CAN	USA
News website / app	29	16	4	27	27	53	30	28
Social media	23	8	8	25	20	18	26	27
Search engine - keyword for a particular website	15	18	27	23	23	9	15	11
Search engine - keyword about a particular news story	9	13	23	9	9	3	8	8
Aggregator site / app	5	32	28	4	4	3	4	4

TABLE 2.3: MAIN GATEWAY TO ONLINE AND SOCIAL NEWS (% OF RESPONDENTS)
Q10a_new2017_rc. Which of these was the **MAIN** way in which you came across news in the last week?
Base: All who came across news in the last week – see tables.

We established in **Figure 2.2** above that the Asia Pacific territories show the greatest preference for soft news in this year's global survey. In **Table 2.3** we see that both Japan (32%) and Korea (28%) have by far the highest preference for using an aggregator site or app as their main way of coming across online and social news.

In contrast they have the lowest preference for using a news site/app or social media to come across news. In addition Korean respondents had the highest preference for using search engines to find a particular website (27%) or story (23%). These are some of the most distinctive characteristics of the Japanese and Korean markets in this year's survey. UK respondents rated news sites/apps very highly for coming across news and we can ascribe this to the dominance of the publicly funded BBC News through both its website and news app. This strong preference for sites/apps may partly explain the comparatively low preference that the British have for social and search engines as ways of discovering news. Australian respondents are quite similar to their Canadian peers in terms of main gateways to news, except for a lower Australian preference for social media (23% vs. Canada 26%).

When we examine smartphone behaviours, a rather more confused story emerges. When asked "which is your MAIN way of accessing online news?" the percentage of survey respondents who use smartphones has increased in most territories, including a significant year-on-year increase in USA from 2016 (32%) to 2017 (41%) and Japan from 2015 (19%) to 2016 (34%).

However **Figure 2.5** indicates responses to the question "Which, if any, of the following devices have you used to access news in the last week?". All countries shown in **Figure 2.5** show a general upward trend for news access via smartphone for period 2015-17 – except Australia. We are aware that 2015 was the first year that the *Digital News* survey was conducted in Australia and the size of the survey panel was smaller than in 2016 and 2017, which may explain this result. However **Figure 2.5** reveals that a number of territories saw a drop in smartphone-for-news access between 2016 and 2017 including France, Italy and Korea. Germany (40%) and Japan (45%) report zero % change whereas USA sees a significant jump between 2016 (48%) and 2017 (55%). It would be premature to suggest that some kind of equilibrium has been reached in terms of news access via smartphone; but the 2016-17 drop in a number of territories remains unexpected.

FIGURE 2.5: NEWS ACCESS VIA SMARTPHONES (% OF RESPONDENTS)
Q8b. Which, if any, of the following devices have you used to access news in the last week?
Base: All markets 2017 – USA: 2269; Canada: 2000; Australia: 2004; UK: 2112; Germany: 2062; France: 2000; Italy: 2011; Spain: 2006; Japan: 2000; Korea: 2002.

COMMENTARY

"YOU ARE FAKE NEWS!" NEWS CONSUMPTION AROUND THE WORLD

Natasha Eves
External Affairs Manager, Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)

President-elect Donald Trump shouted at CNN's Jim Acosta "You are fake news!" in January this year, a term which entered the vernacular during the 2016 US Presidential Election. Broadcast, print, and social media are competing to be the trusted news sources to which audiences can turn. Are audiences changing their news consumption? Is 'fake news' affecting their habits?

According to the *Digital News Report: Australia 2017*, less than half of survey respondents felt that the news media 'does a good job in helping me distinguish fact from fiction' – **Figure 2.4**. Canada was the only country where more than half of respondents supported the assertion. In Canada, there is also an inquiry into the future of digital journalism currently being held, the final report of which is expected to include consideration of 'fake news'[1]. Only 15% of respondents from Denmark agreed with this statement – which is concerning, since Denmark's Center for Terror Analysis recently stated that "fake news...could definitely influence the mentally unstable and unbalanced", possibly leading to terror attacks[2].

Media companies and governments have been quick to respond to the 'fake news' phenomenon. In late 2016 Facebook launched a new initiative, flagging news that was deemed to be 'fake' while both the UK and Australia have initiated public inquiries covering issues relating to 'fake news'. German politicians have proposed legislation requiring social media platforms to remove fake news and illegal posts within 24 hours or face fines of up to half a million Euros. Is it enough? In June this year, Facebook shareholders asked the company to prepare a report on what they're doing to address the circulation of 'fake news', however Facebook replied that a report was unnecessary and the Annual Meeting proposal did not pass[3].

While accusations and reports of fake news have hit both traditional and new media platforms, audiences continue to access news across all platforms. Respondents from Australia and nine other countries indicated a preference for consuming news from digital news brands – **Figure 2.1**. These digital news brands are changing how news is shared and consumed; meanwhile innovations such as 360-degree interactive news videos are tested with audiences, giving them increased control over their experience[4].

The *Digital News Report: Australia* indicates that in many countries, digital brands are preferred for amusing or entertaining news, while (particularly in Europe) print brands are preferred for accuracy, complexity and strong viewpoints – **Table 2.1**. Entertainment is a core value of both digital brands and traditional broadcast and print media outlets. It provides opportunities to explore current affairs from a lighter or different perspective. It is unsurprising, however, that it is more popular through the digital brands, as these are the platforms of choice for younger audiences. Respondents to the survey aged under 35 years showed a stronger interest in 'soft news' than their older counterparts.

One of the most surprising findings of the *Digital News Report: Australia* was the number of territories which saw a drop in smartphone-for-news access between 2016 and 2017. This would seem to contradict the trend of media companies expanding and deepening their digital strategies, focussing on apps and mobile websites. News providers are increasingly integrating video, podcast and multimedia content through mobile, and building their social media presence. There are real opportunities for increased engagement with audiences through these platforms – transforming from the traditional one-to-many information provision, to the integration of consumer reactions and responses, even to encouraging audience involvement in new reporting and proxy 'fact-checking' for news stories.

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1 Gordon, G. (22 Feb 2017) Canada's government shouldn't be in the business of policing 'fake news'. CBC News cbc.ca/news/opinion/government-fake-news-1.3993128 viewed 13 Jun 2017.
2 RT (08 Feb 2017) Fake news could trigger terrorist attacks by mentally unstable people – Danish security service. rt.com/news/376733-denmark-terror-fake-news viewed 13 Jun 2017.
3 BBC News (1 Jun 2017) Facebook shareholders press management on fake news. bbc.com/news/business-40124090 viewed 13 Jun 2017.
4 Digital TV Europe (13 Jul 2016) Euronews to launch virtual reality news with Google support digitaltveurope.net/568362/euronews-to-launch-virtual-reality-news-with-google-support viewed 13 Jun 2017.

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COMMENTARY

FOCUS: EAST ASIA MARKETS

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There are significant internal variations among the six East Asian markets included in the 2017 global *Digital News* survey. These markets can be roughly separated into three groups: the first group is constituted by Japan and Korea, in which only about 20% of the respondents came across news stories via social media and only 6% to 7% of people treated social media as their main source of news.

In these territories, television remained much more likely to be the respondents' main source of news (around 45%). It should be noted that the online news arena in both countries is dominated by a major news aggregator; Yahoo in Japan and Naver – the 'homegrown' web portal – in South Korea.

The second group is made up of Taiwan and Hong Kong, where social media use is much higher. Around half of respondents had come across news stories via social media and about 16-18% treated social media as their main source of news. Despite this television remains a key source of news for many with 40% describing it as their main source

The third group is constituted by Malaysia and Singapore. Similar to Taiwan and Hong Kong, more than 50% of the respondents in these two countries came across news stories via social media and a relatively high percentage of respondents - 24% and 29% respectively - treated social media as their main news source. Significantly, this is higher than the percentages treating television as the main news source.

One thing to keep in mind when interpreting the figures from the region is the different political systems in place in the six markets. Japan, South Korea and Taiwan operate democratic systems whereas Singapore and Malaysia can be described as competitive authoritarian states to the extent that elections exist but the various political institutions – the electoral system, the judiciary, the media sector etc. – are heavily skewed in favour of the existing power holders.

Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region under PR China and does not have a democratic system despite a 'tradition' of civil liberties. The differences in the political system have implications on the degree of press freedom in the countries, which in turn have **implications on the developments of online alternative media and thus the significance of the online space for the communication of news.**

Meanwhile social and political integration in the East Asian region is not as strong as in Europe. There is also significant language difference among the six markets. These factors contribute to the absence of cross-cutting news brands in the region. It should be fair to say that news remains essentially national or even just local to the region.

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NEWS MOMENTS OF 2017

SATURDAY MARCH 25: Australia's Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull stands with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang before the start of an Australian Footbal League (AFL) game at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG).

IMAGE: AAP/DAVID GRAY © 2017 AAP

3 NEWS ACCESS & CONSUMPTION

R. WARWICK BLOOD
JEE YOUNG LEE

- Interest in news remains strong with about 63% of participants saying they were extremely or very interested in news – a figure consistent with our 2016 survey.
- TV news – the public broadcasters, ABC and SBS, and the commercial TV news bulletins – continue to be dominant sources of news for Australian audiences overall.
- About 27% nominated online media as their main source of news, and about 17% preferred social media. Only about 10% nominated newspapers as their main source of news.
- But age plays an important role, as younger people prefer social media as their main news source compared to older audiences who preferred TV news.
- Interestingly just over 48% of participants reported using social media in the week before the survey – a drop of about 8% from our 2016 survey data.
- Urban participants are no more likely than rural participants to nominate social media as their main news source. About 61% of those surveyed reported accessing the internet six or more times a day and there were no differences between urban and rural participants in the number of times they accessed the internet each day.
- Mainstream brands – both online and broadcast – continue to be the most accessed.

NEWS ACCESS

About 61% of those surveyed report accessing the internet six or more times a day. Younger respondents, and those with higher household incomes and higher formal education levels, are the heavier users. There are no differences between urban and rural participants in the number of times they access the internet each day.

Most participants (about 53%) say they access news sources more than once a day with the 18-24 age group the lightest users. Participants in higher income households, and those with a postgraduate education, are more likely to access news sources more than once a day compared to lower income households and those with less formal education. There was no difference in news source accessed between urban and rural participants.

NEWS SOURCES USED

Survey participants were presented with a list of news sources and asked to nominate which ones they had used in the last week. Multiple responses were recorded. **Figure 3.1** shows that the majority of participants (about 63%) reported using TV news bulletins including 24 hour new TV channels.

About 54% reported using websites or apps, including websites and apps of newspapers, magazines or radio companies. Interestingly, just over 48% of participants reported using social media in the week before the survey – a drop of about 7% from our 2016 survey data. About 36% reported using newspapers or magazines and a similar percentage reported using radio, as **Figure 3.1** shows.

FIGURE 3.1: NEWS SOURCES USED IN THE WEEK BEFORE THE SURVEY (MULTIPLE % RESPONSES)
Q3. (Sources / platform) which of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news? Please select all that apply.

INTEREST IN NEWS

Overall about 63% of respondents said they were extremely or very interested in news – a figure consistent with our 2016 survey. Urban participants were slightly more interested in news than rural participants. Those with a postgraduate education, and those with a higher household income, were the most interested in news.

Older participants were more interested in news than younger participants, and males were more interested than females. But for those who are highly interested in news the difference between males and females decreases as age increases. There is little difference in high news interest between males and females among the 45+ age groups.

63% OF RESPONDENTS SAID THEY WERE EXTREMELY OR VERY INTERESTED IN NEWS

Older participants used TV and radio as news sources more than younger participants. Males, older participants, the higher educated, and participants from higher income households, tended to use newspapers and magazines as news sources in the week before the survey.

Older participants used radio as news source more than younger participants. Males, urban and younger participants, those from higher income households, and those with higher education levels, tend to use websites including websites or apps of newspapers, TV and other news outlets. Females and younger participants tended to use social media.

JUST OVER **48%** OF PARTICIPANTS REPORTED USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE WEEK BEFORE THE SURVEY – A DROP OF ABOUT 7% FROM OUR 2016 SURVEY DATA

MAIN NEWS SOURCE

Participants were then asked to nominate their main source of news from among those sources they had nominated as using in the week before the survey. As **Figure 3.2** shows, about 27% nominated online media as their main source of news and over 17% nominated social media. In contrast about 37% nominated TV and about 10% newspapers and magazines.

MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS

27% PREFERRED ONLINE MEDIA

17% PREFERRED SOCIAL MEDIA

FIGURE 3.2: NEWS BRANDS USED VIA ONLINE PLATFORMS IN THE WEEK BEFORE THE SURVEY (%)
Q5b. Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week? Please select all that apply. Via online platforms.

Despite the decline in the use of social media as a news source, age differences among participants nominating their main news source are striking. This is consistent with the pattern identified in our 2016 survey, as **Figure 3.3** illustrates. In 2017, about 38% of the 18-24 year-old group nominated social media as their main source of news compared to about 9% of the 55-64 age group, and about 4% of the 65+ age group.

Figure 3.3 shows that the 18-24 year-old group is the most likely to nominate social media as their main news source compared to older participants who prefer TV news. Nonetheless, about 25% of the 18-24 year-old age group do nominate TV as their main source of news demonstrating that TV remains a powerful source of news in Australia. More than 45% of the 55+ age group nominate TV news as their main source in both 2016 and 2017. The data show a slight decline in social media as the main news source for the 18-24 year-olds between 2017 and 2016.

THERE IS A SLIGHT DECLINE IN SOCIAL MEDIA AS THE MAIN NEWS SOURCE FOR 18-24 YEAR OLDS BETWEEN 2017 AND 2016

FIGURE 3.3: MAIN SOURCES OF NEWS BY AGE GROUPS FOR 2016 AND 2017(%)
Q4. Main source of news.

Rural participants tend to nominate TV news as their main news source compared to urban participants who tend to nominate online media and newspapers as their main sources. But urban participants are no more likely than rural participants to nominate social media as their main news source.

Females rather than males nominate TV and social media as their main sources of news. Males rather than females nominate newspapers and online news as their main sources of news. Lower household income groups tend to nominate TV news as their main source rather than higher income household groups who prefer online news. But demonstrating again the reach of TV news about 31% of high income households nominate TV news as their main source.

TYPES OF NEWS CONTENT

Participants were presented with a list of different types of news content and asked to rate each type on a five point scale: not at all interested; not very interested; somewhat interested; very interested; and extremely interested. Predictably 'news about my region, city or town' rated the highest with about 63% saying they were very or extremely interested. 'International news' (about 60%) and 'news about crime, justice and security' (about 51%) also rated very or highly interested among participants.

Older and rural participants were most interested in news about their region, city or town. Males, older and urban participants, those with higher education and from high income households were most interested in international news. Females, older participants and those with less formal education were most interested in news about crime, justice and security as were rural participants.

BRANDS

To assess the relative importance of competing news brands, participants were presented with a list of traditional brands (TV, radio and newspapers) and a list of online brands (web, mobile, tablet, e-reader) and asked to report which they have used in week before the survey. Among traditional brands, as **Table 3.1** shows, the public broadcaster ABC TV News, and news bulletins on the commercial channels, 7, 9 and TEN dominate – reflecting the analysis above about the persistent presence of traditional TV news in Australian's digital media environment.

TRADITIONAL PLATFORMS	N	%
ABC	783	39.0
Channel 7	771	38.5
Channel 9	734	36.6
Channel TEN	518	25.9
A regional or local newspaper	454	22.7
SBS	361	18.0
Herald Sun	265	13.2
BBC News	247	12.3
Daily Telegraph	227	11.3
Sydney Morning Herald	212	10.6
CNN	180	9.0
Prime7	173	8.6
The Australian	172	8.6
WIN Television	168	8.4
The Age	160	8.0
Sky News	159	7.9
Fox News	151	7.7
Triple J	154	7.5
Courier Mail	149	7.4
Radio National	137	6.8
Triple M	127	6.3
Southern Cross	94	4.7
Australian Financial Review	93	4.6
The Advertiser	91	4.5
KIIS (Mix FM)	82	4.1
Other newspapers or broadcast news channels from outside country	55	2.8
Don't know	11	0.6
None of these	186	9.3

TABLE 3.1: NEWS BRANDS USED VIA TRADITIONAL PLATFORMS IN THE WEEK BEFORE THE SURVEY.
Q5a. Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week? Please select all that apply. Via TV, radio or print only.

Regional and local newspapers continue to be an important news source for participants, especially for rural participants. These data are consistent with our 2016 survey data. One exception is CNN. In 2016 about 6% of participants reported accessing CNN compared to about 9% in 2017. This may reflect interest in international news, including the early days of the Trump presidency, but there are only slight corresponding increases for Fox News and the BBC.

The top three most accessed online news brands were 'News.com.au', 'ABC News online', 'nine.com.au' and 'Yahoo!7', as shown in **Table 3.2**. These data are consistent with our 2016 data.

Reflecting the earlier analysis, there are significant age differences in participant's access of traditional news brands in the week before the survey. Older participants access TV news – ABC, SBS, Channel 7, Channel 9, Channel TEN – far more than younger participants. Access of ABC Radio National follows this age trend.

For online brands, ABC News Online commands strong access across all age groups. **Table 3.3** shows news access for selected online platforms by age groups.

MAINSTREAM NEWS BRANDS – ONLINE AND TRADITIONAL – CONTINUE TO BE THE MOST ACCESSED BY PARTICIPANTS

Table 3.3 shows that of all the participants who accessed ABC News Online in the week before the survey, 23.9% were in the 18-24 year-old age group. Overall more than 20% of all age groups accessed ABC News Online. In contrast *Buzzfeed* was accessed more by younger participants than older age groups.

Of all participants who accessed *Buzzfeed*, 22.6 % were aged 18-24 compared to about 2 percent 2% of participants aged 55+. A similar trend is evident for CNN online but there are no age differences in accessing the most popular site 'news.com.au'. Age differences in accessing the *HuffPost Australia* online are less clear.

Mainstream news brands – both online and traditional – continue to be the most accessed by participants making it difficult for digital newcomers to penetrate a crowded market. But younger participants appear to be attracted to *Buzzfeed* and *HuffPost Australia*, which they accessed far more than older participants.

ONLINE PLATFORMS	N	%
News.com.au	479	23.9
ABC News Online	447	22.3
nine.com.au	423	21.1
Yahoo!7	348	17.4
Sydney Morning Herald (smh.com.au)	281	14.0
BBC News online	224	11.2
HuffPost Australia	215	10.7
The Age (theage.com.au)	214	10.7
Herald Sun (heraldsun.com.au)	194	9.7
Other regional or local newspaper website	190	9.5
The Age (theage.com.au)	213	10.5
Daily Telegraph (dailytelegraph.com.au)	180	9.0
The Australian (theaustralian.com.au)	177	8.8
CNN.com	159	7.9
Guardian online	153	7.6
Buzzfeed News	150	7.5
Skynews.com.au	144	7.2
Channel TEN news online	129	6.4
Courier Mail (couriermail.com.au)	124	6.2
New York Times online	122	6.1
Mail Online	86	4.2
Australian Financial Review (afr.com)	96	4.8
The Advertiser (adelaidenow.com.au)	81	4.1
Mail online	78	3.9
The Conversation	73	3.6
Vice News	69	3.4
Crikey	48	2.4
Junkee	44	2.2
Other online sites from outside Australia	50	2.5
Don't know	31	1.5
None of these	446	22.2

TABLE 3.2: NEWS BRANDS USED VIA ONLINE PLATFORMS IN THE WEEK BEFORE THE SURVEY.
Q5b. Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week? Please select all that apply. Via online platforms.

NEWS BRAND	N	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
news.com.au	479	19.0	29.3	30.2	24.6	24.0	15.7
ABC News Online	447	23.8	23.8	20.3	22.9	21.6	23.8
nine.com.au	423	16.0	20.2	20.2	20.8	26.5	21.6
Yahoo!7	348	13.4	17.1	22.3	17.2	18.8	14.6
Buzzfeed	150	22.6	12.1	6.1	4.7	2.0	2.3
CNN online	159	11.3	13.0	10.8	4.6	4.4	4.3

TABLE 3.3: SELECTED NEWS BRANDS USED VIA ONLINE PLATFORMS IN THE WEEK BEFORE THE SURVEY BY AGE GROUPS (%)

Q5bi. You said you have used the following brands to access news online in the last week. Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

COMMENTARY

ADVERTISING: GOING WHERE THE AUDIENCE GOES

Dan Andrew
Dentsu Mitchell

News has always been one of the main types of content that drives an audience's consumption of a media channel. While the brands and platforms that the public have turned to for news have shifted numerous times over Australia's media history, the desire for news content remains strong. Almost 63% of participants in this year's *Digital News Report: Australia* reported they were extremely or very interested in news and approximately 54% reported they access news more than once a day.

Meanwhile audiences – especially younger consumers – have shifted their attention to online and social news delivered via smartphone. The *Deloitte Mobile Consumer Survey 2016* reported that 84% of Australians own a smartphone and this level of device proliferation means that access to the latest news content is constantly available within arm's reach – literally – while waiting for the bus or in line for the grocery checkout. Advertisers have followed this digital delivery of news, accompanied by their media spends. Back in 2004 the digital share of the national media ad spend was 5%.

Fast forward to 2016 and of the estimated $16 billion dollars spent in the Australian ad market last year[1], the Commercial Economic Advisory Service of Australia (CEASA) reported that 49% of all advertising share of spend for the year went to digital advertising, up 43% from 2015[2]. This gain has come at the expense of traditional TV, radio and especially print media: in 2004 newspapers were commanding the largest share of media advertising spend in Australia with 40% but the sharp decline over the past decade saw that share slashed to 14% by 2015[3].

Facebook and YouTube both reach more eyeballs than TV and this is reflected in advertisers' ad spend. Not only can online channels reach a large audience cost-effectively but the data they return to advertisers can provide more customer insights than ever dreamed of before. But it's only been recently that many advertisers have started to consider what content their commercials may be placed next to, or who may be profiting from their advertising spends beyond their direct client.

As online channels implement new guidelines for content in the interest of Brand Safety, advertisers have started to realise the benefits of a safe, curated and trusted digital environment. Yet the tighter the content restrictions that are implemented by the big online and social platforms, the greater the opportunity for new channels – free of these restrictions – to emerge and attract new audiences and advertisers alike.

While digital channels provide businesses with new routes to potential customers, the same tools allow businesses to buy and place advertising themselves while bypassing traditional media buying routes. In principle anyone can place ads online with less regulations, cheaper production costs and the ability to spend as little or as much as they like to get their persuasive messages out to a wider audience. Partly as a result the advertising sector has become more democratic as the barriers to entry have been greatly reduced.

Australian news providers initially struggled to monetise their online news content but some brands have since found some success with paywalls and other revenue models. Both news.com.au and smh.com.au consistently achieve the largest number of visitors consuming online news and are among the top sites regularly visited by Australians[4]. The Nine and Seven television networks have also found an audience for their online news content. However high-profile international players such as *HuffPost Australia* and *The New York Times* continue to move into the Australian market with locally focused content. This threat to local brands demonstrates that there is sufficient confidence from international players in the potential advertising profit generated from reaching Australian news consumers.

The commercial news media in Australia continues to rely on ad spends for profit and the capital to produce the news content that Australians demand. Advertisers, however, show no such loyalty to media publishers. As audiences change the media channels they consume, advertisers are quick to follow them; hence the profitability and fate of media publishers depend on where audiences turn to next for content.

[1] www.bandt.com.au/advertising/australias-ad-market-will-reach-almost-16-billion-2017-magna.
[2] www.bandt.com.au/advertising/ceasa-report-digital-now-just-shy-50-per-cent-ad-spend-australia.
[3] CEASA: 'Advertising Expenditure in Main Media' (various years).
[4] Nielsen Digital Ratings February 2017.

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NEWS MOMENTS OF 2017

TUESDAY APRIL 4: The Duke of Edinburgh, Patron of the Britain-Australia Society, presents Kylie Minogue with the Britain-Australia Society Award for 2016 during a private audience in the White Drawing Room at Windsor Castle, in Berkshire. The Britain-Australia Award recognises Australian and British individuals who have made a significant contribution to the Australia-UK bilateral relationship. Past recipients include Barry Humphries, and The Rt Hon Lord Hague PC.

IMAGE: PA WIRE via AAP/STEVE PARSONS
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4 SOCIAL DISCOVERY OF NEWS

GLEN FULLER

- 66% of Twitter users think of Twitter as a useful way of getting news whereas 38% of Facebook users think of Facebook as a useful way of getting news.
- Almost half (49%) of respondents that use Facebook as a source of news indicated that they agree or strongly agree that they often see news from outlets that they would not normally use.
- The majority of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger users that have used the apps for news are in the 25-44 years old range. Users of messenger apps are extremely interested in 'Weird' news and 'Science' news.
- Age makes a big difference to the way Facebook and Twitter are used. Amongst those Facebook users that think it is a useful way of getting news, younger users (44 years old and below) are almost twice as likely as older users.
- Similarly, Twitter users are mostly younger and think of Twitter as a useful way of coming across news.
- Older Facebook users (45+ years) are mostly coming across news on the platform when they are doing other things.

SOCIAL DISCOVERY OF NEWS

'Social discovery' refers to the way we encounter online content through social and algorithmic networks. One of the interesting patterns to emerge from the *Digital News Report: Australia* this year is the relationship between social discovery of news via Facebook versus Twitter. Survey data were gathered on users of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. There was an approximately equal distribution of respondents who think of YouTube as a useful way of getting news (47%) compared to those who see news when they are on YouTube for other reasons (45%) with the remainder (8%) unsure (see **Figure 4.1**).The majority of Facebook users (58%) mostly see news when they are on Facebook for other reasons, while only 38% think of Facebook as a useful way of getting news.The situation with Twitter is largely the inverse of this, with 66% thinking of Twitter as a useful way of getting news and only 28% seeing news when on Twitter for other reasons. Users of Twitter and Facebook encounter news in different contexts on the respective social media platforms.

FIGURE 4.1: SOCIAL DISCOVERY OF NEWS (%)
Q12dii. You say you use Facebook for news. Which of the following statements applies best to you?
Q12cii. You say you use Twitter for news. Which of the following statements applies best to you?
OptQ12fi. You say you use YouTube for news. Which of the following statements applies best to you?

Age makes a big difference to the way Facebook and Twitter are used. Facebook users 45+ are almost two to three times as likely compared to others of the same age to encounter news when on Facebook for other reasons.

Similarly, **Figure 4.2** shows that almost two thirds of rural users of Facebook (64%) mostly see news on Facebook for other reasons. Amongst those Facebook users that think it is a useful way of getting news, younger users (44 years old and below) are almost twice as likely as older users. Twitter users are mostly younger with 70% aged 44 years or younger.

Similarly Twitter users are mostly younger and think of Twitter as a useful way of coming across news. However these figures need to be tempered with the qualification that Twitter more so than Facebook is considered a platform where users seek out news on purpose.

58% OF FACEBOOK USERS MOSTLY SEE NEWS WHEN THEY ARE ON FACEBOOK FOR OTHER REASONS

FIGURE 4.2: SOCIAL DISCOVERY OF NEWS, BY AGE (%)
Q12dii. You say you use Facebook for news. Which of the following statements applies best to you?
Q12cii. You say you use Twitter for news. Which of the following statements applies best to you?

There is little evidence of a so-called 'filter bubble' if it is understood in terms of exposure to alternative sources of news. Only 16% of Facebook users disagreed that they often see news from outlets that they would not normally use and approximately the same share (15%) disagreed that they often see news they are not interested in. When asked if they often see news stories that they are not interested in more than half of Facebook users (52%) indicated they either agreed or strongly agreed. Almost half (49%) of respondents that use Facebook as a source of news indicated that they agree or strongly agree that they often see news from outlets that they would not normally use. Does this mean Facebook users are reporting that they are constantly being presented with news from outlets they would not 'normally' see?

SEGMENTING SOCIAL MEDIA USE

The difference between the way Facebook users and Twitter users encounter news seems like a neat distinction between two different kinds of social media networks, but this is not the case when users are grouped in terms of discrete use, either using only Facebook (not Twitter), only Twitter (not Facebook), or users that use both Twitter and Facebook. Just under half of users that use both Facebook and Twitter for news either agree or strongly agree that social media does a good job in helping them distinguish fact from fiction, users of only Facebook or only Twitter are less likely to agree (37% and 32% respectively, see **Figure 4.3**). On the other hand 41% of users that only use Twitter either disagree (35%) or strongly disagree (6%) that social media does a good job of helping them distinguish fact from fiction.

FIGURE 4.3: DISTINGUISHING FACT FROM FICTION (%)
Q12dii. You say you use Facebook for news. Which of the following statements applies best to you?
Q12cii. You say you use Twitter for news. Which of the following statements applies best to you?
Q6_6. Social media does a good job in helping me distinguish fact from fiction.

The public sphere organised around Twitter is often described as 'left wing' and there is some evidence to support this. From those that use Twitter (including those that use Twitter and Facebook) as a source of news 44% identify as left wing, while 22% identify as right wing.

Funnily enough, if Twitter is left wing, then so is Facebook. When Facebook users are analysed in same way 34% identify as left wing and 20% identify as right wing. The big political difference between users of Facebook and Twitter is not orientation, but between those with a political orientation and those that responded that they didn't know (see **Table 4.1**).

Only 6% of Twitter users that use the platform for news reported they didn't know their political orientation, with numbers similar between those using only Twitter and those that use Twitter and Facebook, while over 14% of Facebook users that only use Facebook and not Twitter for news reported the same.

POLITICAL IDENTIFICATION OF TWITTER USERS

44% LEFT WING

22% RIGHT WING

	N	VERY LEFT WING	FAIRLY LEFT WING	SLIGHTLY LEFT OF CENTRE	CENTRE	SLIGHTLY RIGHT OF CENTRE	FAIRLY RIGHT WING	VERY RIGHT WING	DON'T KNOW
Facebook not Twitter	688	4.6	11.6	15.6	31.9	7.5	9.2	3.2	16.4
Twitter not Facebook	69	24.6	10.1	7.5	25.1	14.9	7.1	4.8	5.9
Facebook and Twitter	93	14.6	19.2	13.6	27.8	12.1	5.3	1.1	6.4

TABLE 4.1: POLITICAL IDENTIFICATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA USERS (%)
Q12dii. You say you use Facebook for news. Which of the following statements applies best to you?
Q12cii. You say you use Twitter for news. Which of the following statements applies best to you?
Q1f. Some people talk about 'left', 'right' and 'centre' to describe parties and politicians. (Generally socialist parties would be considered 'left wing' whilst conservative parties would be considered 'right wing'). With this in mind, where would you place yourself on the following scale?

Lastly, social media users that use both Twitter and Facebook report much higher rates of participation across all measures of engagement compared to those users that only use Twitter or Facebook as a source of news. In some cases, users that use both Facebook and Twitter report engagement at levels twice that of users that only use one social media service for news. Both Twitter and Facebook are designed to enable the easy sharing of news and this is reflected in the rates of sharing via email by Facebook users (14%) and Twitter users (24%) compared to sharing via social media network (34% for both groups). Interestingly many more users that use both Facebook and Twitter will share a news story via email (41%) and via social media network (51%).

The only time there is any approximate parity between engagement levels of those users that use both Facebook and Twitter and users that only use one service is regarding participation in a campaign or group based around a news subject. Only 9% of users that only use Facebook would take part in a campaign or group based around a news subject, while 20% of Twitter users and 22% of users that use both Facebook and Twitter would take part in a campaign or group based around a news subject.

Twitter does allow for the formation of more *ad hoc* groupings compared to Facebook where belonging to a 'group' is a platform-specific action. The final point here is that 23% of Facebook-only users and 14% of Twitter-only users take part in no engagement or sharing practices, while only 7% of users that use both services do not engage with any news engagement or sharing practices.

RISE OF MESSENGER APPS

A big shift in this year's data is the apparent increase in the use of messaging apps and services for the distribution of news. First, looking at the total number of uses across all social media channels of using social media to access news, there has been an increase in the total number of people who do not use any of the social media channels asked about during the survey (819 in 2017 compared to 762 in 2016). On the other hand, the total number of positive responses to using a given social media channel across all social media types has increased from 2617 in 2016 to 2959 in 2017.

The year-on-year data is complicated by the separation of Facebook and Facebook Messenger in the 2017 survey, but not in earlier years. Facebook Messenger as a source of news received 162 positive responses in the 2017 survey and this is the same number as Twitter.

Even if figures are used comparing only those messaging apps and services that were tracked in 2016 and again in 2017 the growth is dramatic.

Messaging apps and services tracked across both years include: WhatsApp, Snapchat, WeChat, Viber, Line, Telegram, and Periscope. In 2016 there were 160 positive responses to using these apps and services while in 2017 there were 373. Some notable examples of growth include WhatsApp (150 from 83) and Snapchat (48 from 28). It is difficult to discern how many different people use these apps and services, however.

THOSE AGED 18-44 YEARS ARE ALMOST THREE TIMES AS LIKELY TO SHARE AN ARTICLE VIA INSTANT MESSENGER SERVICES COMPARED TO OLDER COHORTS

FIGURE 4.4: PREFERRED MESSENGER APPS, 2016/2017 (NUMBER OF RESPONSES)
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.

Drilling down into the demographic detail about who uses messenger apps and services reveals that, perhaps unsurprisingly, older users shy away from using WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger. The majority of WhatsApp users that have used the app for news are in the 25-44 years range.

The situation is similar for Facebook Messenger but with a more spread into the 18-24 and 45-54 year old cohorts. High income earners are not as likely to use Facebook Messenger for news (6%) compared to medium and low income earners (9% and 10% respectively) but this might be related to the age spread. If news consumption is as much about the context within which news circulates, including how it is shared and who shares it, then the situation is in some ways more complicated. The younger 18-44 years age group is almost three times as likely to share an article via instant messenger services compared to the older cohorts.

When social media access of news is cross-tabulated against news interest there are some remarkable patterns in comparing the interests of those that indicate that they use Facebook for news compared to those that indicated that they use any of the messenger apps. First, there were comparatively fewer respondents that indicated news

interests and did not use social media. For example, only 100 respondents indicated an interest in 'Entertainment' news and did not use any social media channel to access news compared to 705 respondents that indicated low or no interest in Entertainment news and did not use social media channels to access news. Two-thirds of Twitter users also indicated low to no interest in 'Entertainment' news. The only news interests where more respondents indicated high interest and did not use social media were 'International' and 'Region'. Users of messenger apps and services seem to be much more likely to be interested in all types of news compare to Facebook users – and compared to respondents that do not use any social media channels to access news. This distinction also holds for those who use Facebook compared to Facebook Messenger. In particular, users of messenger apps are extremely interested in 'Weird' and 'Science'.

FEELING INFORMED?

In a recent talk, Adam Mosseri – Facebook's Vice President of Product – described News Feed as a "discovery product" which he defines in terms of helping users find sources of information that they find 'meaningful'. During question time after the presentation moderator Jeff Jarvis asks Mosseri to define what 'news' is from the perspective of Facebook, considering Facebook calls its feed the 'News Feed'. Mosseri's answer is instructive for beginning to appreciate how different kinds of information are valued by Facebook's algorithms:

> We are not looking to redefine news. I think news is 'new information about noteworthy events'... I think is essentially the most dictionary-like definition that I've come across. That's, I think, fine... But what we're trying to do more at Facebook is focus on 'informative content'. 'News' is a critical piece of that, but is not the only critical piece.

He then goes on to list a series of examples of "informative content" ("learning about the basketball scores" etc.) and declares that Facebook wants "to nurture that as well as traditional news". Mosseri explains that being informed is one of the algorithmic signals used to determine relevance and ends the explanation with the caveat that Facebook does not measure whether people are actually informed, but whether they feel informed. Social discovery of 'meaningful information' via Facebook therefore should not be understood as separate from the context of discovery and the network effects of millions of users sending signals to Facebook that they 'feel' informed.

Mosseri, A. *How News Feed works*. Presentation to International Journalism Festival. www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuXmXjP88Lc posted 07 Apr 2017.

5 FOLLOWING POLITICIANS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

CAROLINE FISHER

- 20% of Australia's adult online population follow politicians and political parties on social media.
- The majority of these (72%) follow left wing or centre parties and politicians.
- 55% indicated they followed due to dissatisfaction with the news media.
- 41% indicated they followed for partisan reasons.

The recent US election clearly demonstrated an increasing use of social media by politicians to communicate directly with the public and effectively bypass the scrutiny of the news media. This trend has also been observed in Australia, particularly in the case of Pauline Hanson, the leader of the One Nation Party, who refuses to speak to sections of the Australian media and publishes directly to citizens via social media.

Digital News Report: Australia 2017 examined this issue to find out who is following politicians and political parties on social media in Australia and why.

HOW MANY AUSTRALIANS FOLLOW?

The number of Australians following politicians on social media appears to be growing. 20% of the survey respondents said they followed a politician or political party on social media. That represents 20% of Australia's adult online population and 36% of those who use social media for news. When asked similar questions in 2016 13% of respondents indicated they followed politicians and political parties[1]. This difference might be attributed to the July 2016 Australian federal election and the high level of interest in the US Presidential campaign at the time of the survey. Six countries in this year's international survey – including Australia – asked whether social media news consumers also followed politicians and political parties on social media. The data show that the USA has the highest rate of people following politicians on social media, Germany the lowest, with Australia and Ireland in the middle (see **Figure 5.1**).

FIGURE 5.1: FOLLOWING POLTICIANS ON SOCIAL MEDIA (%)

Q12gi. When using social media for news (e.g. Facebook, Twitter or You Tube) have you followed or subscribed to a channel/page of a politician or political party? Please select all that apply: Yes, I follow a politician or political party of the left; Yes, I follow a politician or political party of the centre; Yes, I follow a politician or political party of the right; No, I don't follow any politician or political party via social media.

POLITICAL LEANING

Respondents were asked if they followed politicians and parties from the left, centre or right of politics. The majority tend to follow politicians and parties from the left (37%) or centre (35%) of politics with less than a third following politicians and parties on the right (27%), as **Figure 5.2** indicates. This inclination towards the left of the political spectrum was also observed internationally and this ideological preference requires further research.

Not only do more online news consumers follow parties and politicians on the left of the political spectrum, they also tend to follow one side of politics or the other. Only a small percentage of people choose to follow parties and politicians of different political persuasions:

- 12% follow parties across the spectrum left, centre and right.
- 8% follow left and centre parties and politicians.
- 5% follow right and centre parties and politicians.
- Just under 3% follow left and right parties and politicians.

FIGURE 5.2: FOLLOWING POLITICIANS ON THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM (%)
Q12gi_2017. When using social media for news (e.g. Facebook, Twitter or You Tube) have you followed or subscribed to a channel/page of a politician or political party? Please select all that apply.

WHO FOLLOWS?

We conducted a detailed demographic analysis to develop profiles of the people who follow politicians and parties on social media in Australia. It revealed that those who do are more likely to be:

- Male.
- 25-34 years old.
- Following parties from the left.
- Educated at university or have a postgraduate qualification.
- Middle income earners.
- Of the same political persuasion as their friends.
- 'Trusters' of news – both generally and of the news they use most.
- Highly interested in news generally and political news specifically. However they are also likely to try to avoid the news either sometimes, often or occasionally.
- Confident in their understanding of the important political issues facing the country.
- Confident in their ability to participate in politics.

65% OF THOSE WHO FOLLOW POLITICIANS CITED DISSATISFACTION WITH THE NEWS MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF POLITICS

DEMOGRAPHICS ALONG PARTISAN LINES

Demographic analysis along partisan lines shows clearer partisan distinctions:

'Left followers' share all of the characteristics listed above. In addition, they have the highest trust in news and highest interest in both general and political news of the three groups.

'Right followers': while followers of right-wing parties and politicians are also likely to be male and aged 25-34 years old, they are more likely to live in rural areas. There is very little difference across income and education levels but they are slightly more likely to have had some university education and be low income earners. However they are less likely to:

- Trust in the news media generally, and the news they most use.
- Share the same political views as their friends.
- Have a good understanding of the important political issues facing the country.
- Feel equipped to participate in politics.

'Centre followers': males aged 25-34 years old are also the largest cohort who follow politicians and parties from the centre. However they are more likely to live in urban areas and be high income earners, but are less likely to have a post graduate qualification.

Not only is this group centrist in political outlook, it holds the middle ground in relation to the media as well as it is more likely to neither trust nor distrust the news, with about half believing both the news media and social media do a good job in helping them to distinguish fact from fiction.

WHY DO PEOPLE FOLLOW?

Respondents were asked to select from a range of reasons why they followed a politician or political party on social media (See **Figure 5.3** below):

- 32% said they did it for partisan reasons such as supporting the politician or party followed, and a desire to demonstrate their support to others.
- However 65% selected reasons that reflect dissatisfaction with the news media's coverage of politics, including: they prefer to receive information directly from politicians and unfiltered by the news media; the news media do not report fairly; the news media tend to ignore the politician or party they follow; the news media do not give as much detailed information as the direct feed.

FIGURE 5.3: MAIN REASONS FOR FOLLOWING POLITICIANS (%)

Q12gii. You say you follow a politician or political party via social media, what are some of the reasons for this? Please select all that apply: I like a particular politician/political party; I prefer to hear directly from a politician/political party than have their views filtered by others; I don't think the news media report the views of politicians/political parties fairly; The mainstream news media tend to ignore the politician/party I follow; These feeds provide me with more detailed information than I can get via the news media; I want to show others who I support politically; Other; Don't know.

When analysed along partisan lines, the data show that 'Left followers':

- Are much more likely to follow politicians and parties they 'like'.
- Think the news media ignores the politician and party they follow.
- Are keen to show others who they support.

'Right followers' are more likely to think that:

- The mainstream news media do not report the views of politicians and political parties fairly.
- Social media feeds provide them with more information than they can get via the news media.

Both Left and Right followers are equally likely to prefer hearing directly from the politician or party without being filtered by others.

DISINTERMEDIATION

When the media environment was dominated by mass media platforms such as newspapers, television and radio, politicians and journalists were dependent on each other to fulfil their roles. With the aid of digital media, anyone – including politicians – can publish directly to citizens and bypass the filter and scrutiny of the press.

It also means the audience is no longer reliant on the news media to access political information. Instead they can go straight to the politician or party and cut out the middle man. This year's *Digital News Report: Australia* shows that an increasing number of adult Australians online are going down this route though it still remains a minority activity; since 80% of online Australian news consumers do not follow politicians and parties via social media.

The ability to bypass the news media is a phenomenon called 'disintermediation'. It is also referred to as 'self-representation' or 'self-publishing'. Disintermediation means not being 'mediated' or having your message edited, interpreted or filtered by the news media. On the one hand, this shift offers greater opportunity for community participation in the political process and engagement with elected representatives. On the other hand, it offers politicians and parties an opportunity to skilfully target members of the community with unfiltered and one-sided spin.

Though the data clearly show more people are following left-wing parties and politicians than those on the right, they do not tell us which individual politicians and political parties are being followed. Given the high profile of the recent US Presidential campaign at the time of the survey, one must assume that at least some of those being followed include overseas politicians and parties.

POLITICIANS ARE LARGELY PREACHING TO THE CONVERTED VIA THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA FEEDS

Locally, politicians with the highest number of followers on Facebook include Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull with 350,582 followers; One Nation leader Pauline Hanson with 198,565; Labor leader Bill Shorten with 172,353; and Greens leader Richard Di Natale with 71,402.

Regardless of who they are following, only 21% say they follow politicians and parties they 'like'. Whether they 'like' them or not, these followers tend to stick to one side of politics or the other with only 3% following both left and right-wing politicians and parties. In terms of following politicians, this suggests people are self-selecting their partisan sources, which might impact the range of alternative political views to which they are exposed, depending on the breadth of other news sources they consume.

PARTIES ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM ARE FAILING TO ATTRACT FEMALE FOLLOWERS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

It also suggests that politicians are largely preaching to the converted via their social media feeds. Given the majority of those who follow say their friends also share the same political outlook, it is unlikely that politicians and parties are reaching far beyond their base of supporters.

The data also suggest that left-wing parties are doing a better job at reaching a younger support base than the centre and right parties. However the gendered nature of the data shows that parties across the political spectrum are failing to attract female followers via social media.

While only a fifth of Australia's adult online news consumers follow the direct feeds of politicians and parties, some of the reasons for doing so raise important issues for political news journalism in Australia. The data point to a strong preference by both Left and Right followers to consume news content without it being filtered and interpreted by the news media.

Demographic analysis shows that people who follow left politicians tend to be confident in their understanding of political matters and are able to participate in discussion about it. In that sense, they may feel that they do not need the media to interpret the world for them because they can do it for themselves. In by-passing the filter of the news media these consumers are asserting control over the information they access, in the same was as politicians are asserting control over the information they publish.

However, those who follow right politicians are less likely to feel they have a good understanding of political matters and able to participate in discussion; have lower trust in news media; and lower interest in political news than left followers. Therefore their preference for bypassing the news media could be different. The data also point to issues of fairness and completeness of political news coverage, as well as the narrowness of the political news agenda which fails to reflect the interests of sections of the community. This reflects issues of dissatisfaction and lack of trust in the way the news media covers politics.

OVER A SIX-WEEK PERIOD, ONE OF SENATOR PAULINE HANSON'S VIDEOS RECEIVED MORE THAN ONE MILLION VIEWS

These responses echo complaints made by Pauline Hanson, who accuses the mainstream news media of bias and unfair reporting. Most recently, Ms Hanson publically announced in a pre-recorded video statement that she will no longer speak to journalists from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Instead she operates almost solely via social media and uses her Facebook page as a live streaming television station broadcasting directly to her followers. Over a six-week period, one of her videos received more than one million views.

In the past few months, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's behaviour has also started to more closely emulate that of the One Nation leader. Mr Turnbull has begun to broadcast policy announcements – such as changes to 457 visas – directly to the public via Facebook video, telling his Facebook followers that "I want you to be the first to know about a major announcement we are making today". Only after his Facebook announcement did the Prime Mionister hold a press conference, take questions and undergo scrutiny from the press gallery. In just three weeks, this one short video had been watched 935,000 times.

This type of direct publishing by politicians and parties is only of serious concern matters if people stop accessing alternative sources of political information. So far, these data indicate those following politicians are continuing to consume other news media as well. As long as they do, then the danger of consumers relying on unfiltered political public relations material for their political news is small. However, if dissatisfaction with the way the news media covers politics increases then it could lead to fewer people accessing political journalism that offers more than one perspective, which might be cause for concern. In a time of shrinking newsrooms the ability for politicians to bypass the scrutiny of the press gallery only makes things harder for the traditional gatekeepers to hold power to account. It also makes it more difficult for consumers to discern party political content from other news.

[1] 2017 survey respondents were asked directly: "When using social media for news (e.g. Facebook, Twitter or You Tube) have you followed or subscribed to a channel/page of a politician or political party? Please select all that apply: Yes, I follow a politician or political party of the left; Yes, I follow a politician or political party of the centre; Yes, I follow a politician or political party of the right; No, I don't follow any politician or political party via social media". In 2016 people were asked a slightly different question: "When accessing news through social media like Facebook, Google Plus, YouTube or Twitter, have you subscribed to or followed any of the following? Please select all that apply: <1> A news organisation; <2> A journalist; <3> A political party; <4> A politician; <5> A campaigning group; <6 > None of these".

COMMENTARY

BEYOND THE ECHO CHAMBER

Andrew Leigh MP
Federal Member for Fenner

When I was first elected to the Parliament of Australia in 2010, my team regularly sent a glossy flyer to everyone in the electorate bearing the eponymous title 'The Leigh Report'. In addition, most electors in my northside Canberra seat would get a letter from me once or twice a year, discussing a specific issue or a local forum.

Over the past seven years we've steadily shifted away from the letterbox and towards the inbox, the browser and the app. My website is updated with new material several times a day and I maintain an active Facebook page. I have an Instagram account. Twitter tells me I've written nearly 9000 tweets. When I deliver a major speech, it goes up on an 'Andrew Leigh – Speeches and Conversations' podcast, available through iTunes and other podcast apps. Last year I started a second podcast: 'The Good Life', which interviews experts about living a happier, healthier and more ethical life. Each month I send out an email about what's going on in national politics. It used to be called 'The Leigh eReport' to distinguish it from the physical version. Three years after sending out the last physical newsletter, we realised it wasn't ever coming back and we changed the email update to 'The Leigh Report'.

Among my parliamentary colleagues, there's nothing unusual in the fact that I engage with electors through a personal website, emails, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and podcasts. According to the 2016 Australian Election Study, the share of voters who follow a politician on Facebook or Twitter rose from 2% in 2010 to 7% in 2016[1]. Social media now plays an essential part in the political process. Last election, my colleague Julian Hill and I did a Facebook Live event in a local marketplace, talking about inequality while chatting with stallholders. When his multicultural community was criticised, my colleague Chris Bowen hit back not with a press release, but with a heart-warming video that told the stories of Fairfield's successful migrants.

Few politicians better mastered social media than Kevin Rudd, who once cut himself shaving and promptly tweeted a picture. Rudd even had half a million followers on the Chinese social media site Weibo. At its best, social media lets us expand the political conversation, reaching people who might otherwise be disengaged, disinterested or disconnected. Yet while politicians can make playful use of social media, there is also a risk that it fuels the trend towards anger and political polarisation. Occasionally I've seen posts go viral that contain absurd claims and outright untruths. Even when you get the facts right, it's a sad reality that partisan anger almost invariably gets more retweets than thoughtful moderation. Some days, I wonder if there are any swing voters on Twitter at all.

Two recent US studies of social media and partisanship reach different conclusions. Analysing the rollout of broadband internet across the country, Lelkes et al. found that faster connections led people to spend more time online, to read more partisan media and to become more politically polarised[2]. Conversely Boxell et al. observed that the rise in partisanship has been most pronounced among demographic groups that are least likely to use social media. For example partisanship has grown more among 75+ year olds than among 18-39 year olds[3].

A great strength of mainstream media is that it helps avoid the 'echo chamber' effect. At their best, journalists provide context and analysis, allowing the audience to engage with a whole range of viewpoints. Ironically, journalists must now keep up with the increasing social media output of politicians. They must hold us to account for what we say both in the chamber and online. It'll only get tougher as the number of journalists employed by traditional news organisations in Australia shrinks and the number of social media accounts held by politicians grows.

We can't stop the inexorable social media trend, but we must not lose the values that make a strong democracy: big ideas, rigorous evidence, an ability to admit mistakes and a fundamental sense that our shared identity comes before our partisan differences.

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1 Cameron. S. & McAllister, I. (2016). Trends in Australian Political Opinion, Results from the Australian Election Study 1987-2016, Appendix. Australian National University, Canberra, p.12.

2 Lelkes Y., Sood G., Iyengar S. 'The Hostile Audience: The Effect of Access to Broadband Internet on Partisan Affect' *American Journal of Political Science* (Jan 2017) 61:1 pp.5-20.

3 Boxell L., Gentzkow M., Shapiro J.M. (March 2017) 'Is the Internet Causing Political Polarization? Evidence from Demographics' *National Bureau of Economic Research* working paper 23258.

Andrew Leigh is the Federal Member for Fenner and the Shadow Assistant Treasurer. His most recent book is *The Luck of Politics*. He holds a PhD in public policy from Harvard University and is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences.

NEWS MOMENTS OF 2017

SATURDAY MARCH 25: Shannon Campbell of the Brisbane Lions (left) and Kellie Gibson of the Adelaide Crows compete for a high ball during the AFLW Grand Final game at Metricon Stadium in Carrara on the Gold Coast.

IMAGE: AAP/DAN PELED © 2017 AAP

6 PAYING FOR ONLINE NEWS

FRANCO PAPANDREA

- The growth of free online sources of news is turning paid news into a niche product.
- 13% paid for online news in the preceding year (up from 10% in 2016).
- Males (68%) are more than twice as likely as females (32%) to pay for online news.
- The lowest likelihood (5%) of having paid for online news was recorded by those who used social media as their main source of news and the highest (22%) by those who used print media as their main source.
- Getting access to breaking news was the most important reason for paid access to online news.
- The resistance to paying for online news is hardening.
- 83% of those who had not paid for online news were not willing to pay for it in the next twelve months (up from 74% in 2016).
- 50% of those who had not paid for online news said they would not be prepared to pay for any type of news in the next 12 months.
- The wide availability of free news is the key reason for not paying for online news.

FEW PAY FOR ACCESS TO ONLINE NEWS

The high level of news consumption in Australia is in sharp contrast with the small proportion of people who pay to access online news. While a vast majority (over 80%) of Australians access news at least once a day, only 13% of respondents to the 2017 survey made some form of payment to access online news.

Although proportionally somewhat higher than in the previous two surveys (2015: 11%; 2016: 10%), there is little indication that the rise is associated with an upward trend in payment for access. Most people rely on 'free' media for their access to news.

ONLY 13% OF RESPONDENTS MADE SOME FORM OF PAYMENT TO ACCESS ONLINE NEWS

FIGURE 6.1: PAID FOR ACCESS TO ONLINE NEWS, BY COUNTRY (%)
Q7a. Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service in the last year? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition)
Base: Total sample in each country.

The proportion of people paying to access online news in Australia is consistent with trends in the rest of the world (see **Figure 6.1**). Indeed the proportion of Australians paying for online corresponds approximately to the average for all the countries participating in this year's survey. Scandinavian countries, with Norway in first place (26%), report a substantially higher rate of payment. Australia's rate compares favorably with that in most other major English-speaking countries. It is lower than that in the US (16%), but substantially higher than that in Canada (8%) Ireland (9%) and the UK (6%).

The gender distribution of those paying for online news is highly skewed towards male. Among those reporting having paid for online news, males outnumber females by a factor of more than two to one (68%and 32% respectively).

Younger (less than 45 years) news consumers were more likely (17%) than older (10%) to have paid for online news. The 25-34 age group recorded the highest proportion of those paying for online news (22%) and the 55-64 age group the lowest proportion (9%). The likelihood of payment rises with increasing levels of education. Almost half (49%) of those who had paid for online news had medium levels of income ($50,000 - $99,000) and 24% reported higher levels of income. Urban residents were somewhat more likely (14%) than rural residents (11%) to have paid for online news.

Those who made a payment for online news in the past year were extremely or very highly interested in news (85%) and largely accessed news more than once a day (71%). However, 34% of them indicated they had never actively avoided news and 18.4% indicated they often actively avoided news.

Figure 6.2 shows that subscriptions were the most common form of payment for online news. Of those who had paid for access to online news, 38% had a subscription for a digital news service and an additional 24% had a print/cable/broadband or other subscription that included access to a digital news service. Some 25% had made a donation to support a digital service and 10% had made a single one-off payment for a single article or edition.

In terms of the overall response to the survey, however, only 8% of adult Australians had a subscription providing access to a digital news service in the previous year, 3% made a donation and 1% made a single one-off payment.

FIGURE 6.2: TYPE OF PAYMENT FOR ONLINE NEWS (%)
Q7ai. (have paid for online news) by type of payment.

MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS INFLUENCES PAYMENT FOR ACCESS

The popularity of free to air television and radio news has been a major factor in the historic decline of newspaper circulation. The arrival and growth of free online sources of news has exacerbated that decline to the point that paid news has become a niche product. It should be noted, however, that traditional media are significant players in the supply of online access to news via their websites and applications.

When the combined traditional and online supply of news by the major media is taken into account in **Figure 6.3**, the survey data show that television is the main source of news for 46% of adult Australians making it by far the most popular main source.

Print media (including their online websites) rank second in popularity as the main source of news for 25% of respondents. In rank-order, social media is third (17%) and radio fourth (8%). Other sources, in aggregate, were cited as a main source of news by 5% of respondents.

Overall, the survey results show that the vast majority of respondents (83%) get all the news they want from free sources. Furthermore, while the traditional source of paid news (print media) is the main source of news for a quarter of respondents, it is clear from the survey results that a substantial proportion of them do not pay for access to online news.

Numerically the subgroup of respondents who had paid for online access to news was drawn largely from consumers who depended on television (45%) and print media (40%) as their main source of news. The higher representation of television among those who had paid for online news was largely due to its dominance as a main source of news among all respondents rather than a greater disposition to pay for online access to news.

FIGURE 6.3: MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS (COMBINED TRADITIONAL AND ONLINE) (%)
Q4. You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your MAIN source of news?

Consumers relying on print media for their main source of news were proportionally more likely than others to have paid for online access to news (22%) in the previous year. Those using television as the main source of news were substantially less likely to have paid (13%) and those relying on social media the least likely to have paid (5%). Details are provided in **Figure 6.4**.

THOSE USING TELEVISION AS THE MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS WERE SUBSTANTIALLY LESS LIKELY TO HAVE PAID FOR ONLINE NEWS

FIGURE 6.4: PROPORTION PAYING FOR ONLINE NEWS BY MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS
Q7a. Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service in the last year? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition).
Q4. You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your MAIN source of news?

Males were more likely than females to have made a single payment or donation for online news. The converse was the case for other forms of payments (primarily subscriptions). The 25-34 age group was responsible for approximately half of the reported single payments/donations and for 30% of all recorded payments. Older age groups were more likely to have held an ongoing subscription for online news.

The medium income group was responsible for almost half of all recorded payments (68% of all single payments and donations and 37% of subscriptions). The other income groups reported similar payment patterns. The likelihood of payment increased with level of education: those with some university education were responsible for almost 59% of all payments.

TYPE OF NEWS COVERAGE INFLUENCING DECISION TO PAY

Getting access to breaking news was the most cited reason in the decision to pay for online news. Respondents were asked to indicate the types of news coverage that were most important to their decision to pay for access to online news. Half (50%) of all those reporting at least one reason cited breaking news. Reporting on recent events was the second most often cited reason. "Comment and opinion" and "In-depth analysis or explanation" were virtually tied in third place. Freely available online source of news are less likely than paid sources to provide extensive coverage of these four types of news or have sufficient capacity to provide timely and accurate coverage of breaking news. The citing of other types of news as most important reasons to pay for online news was significantly less frequent (see **Figure 6.5**).

FIGURE 6.5: TYPES OF NEWS MOST IMPORTANT TO DECISION TO PAY IN PAST YEAR (%)
Q7aiii. You said that you paid for online news in the last year... Which types of news coverage were most important to your decision to pay? Please select all that apply.

Respondents were asked to indicate the most important reasons for their decision to pay for online news. In this instance there was no significantly outstanding reason identified by respondents. The most cited reason "to consume news from a range of sources" was cited in 32% of cases, but was closely followed by three other reasons all of which were cited in 30% of cases.

Taken together these four reasons suggest that convenience is likely to be an influential factor in decisions to pay for online news. Two other reasons, "want to help journalism" and "no free access to favourite news sources" were the next most often cited reasons (each in 25% of cases). Details of the ranking are provided in **Figure 6.6** below.

FIGURE 6.6: MOST IMPORTANT REASONS FOR PAYING FOR ONLINE NEWS (%)
Q7aii. You said that you have paid for online news in the last year... What are the most important reasons for this? Please select all that apply.

The ongoing deep restructuring of the newspaper industry as it struggles to competes with online news platforms is regularly bemoaned as a threat to the critical role of a free press in democratic societies with consequential calls for increased support for journalism.

Wanting to help journalism (25%) was the fifth ranked reason for paying for online news (see **Figure 6.7**). Internationally, the Australian response was exceeded only by that in the US second and both were well above the all countries average of 13%.

FIGURE 6.7: WANT TO HELP FUND JOURNALISM, BY COUNTRY (%)
Q7aii. You said that you have paid for online news in the last year... What are the most important reasons for this?

When asked to indicate their most important reasons for not paying for access to digital news in the last year more than half (51%) of respondents included 'I can get online news for free' as one of the reasons. The second most cited reason was that 'Online news isn't worth paying for'. More details are provided in **Figure 6.8**.

FIGURE 6.8: MOST IMPORTANT REASONS FOR NOT PAYING FOR ONLINE NEWS IN PAST YEAR (%)
Q7avi. You said that you have not paid for online news in the last year... What are the most important reasons for this? Please select all that apply.

WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR ONLINE NEWS

Resistance to paying for online news is hardening. Almost 83% of those who had not paid for digital content indicated they were very (63%) or somewhat (20%) unlikely to pay in the next twelve months for online news from particular sources they liked.

This was significantly higher than the 74% reported in the 2016 survey. Only 12% indicated being somewhat (8%) or very (4%) likely to pay in the next twelve months. In response to which type of news coverage they would be most willing to pay for in the next twelve months, 50% said they would not be prepared to pay for any type of news. In terms of individual types of news, breaking news (11%) followed by in depth analysis or explanation (8%) where the two most likely to motivate payment.

50% OF RESPONDENTS WOULD NOT BE PREPARED TO PAY FOR ANY TYPE OF NEWS IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

FIGURE 6.9: WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR NEWS IN NEXT TWELVE MONTHS, BY TYPE OF NEWS (%)
Q7av. You said that you have not paid for online news in the last year... Which type of news coverage would you be most willing to pay for in the next 12 months? Please select all that apply.

ONLINE PAYMENT FOR DIGITAL MEDIA

Respondents to the survey were asked to indicate all the types of digital media for which they had made an online payment in the last year.

More than half (52%) reported having made at least one online payment for digital media. The types of digital media paid for online are shown in **Figure 6.10**.

FIGURE 6.10: ONLINE PAYMENT FOR DIGITAL MEDIA IN PAST YEAR (%)
Q7b_2017. Thinking more generally, which of the following types of digital media (if any) have you paid for online in the last year?

Previous experience with online purchase of digital media appears to have a substantial correlation with disposition to pay for digital news. Only 4% of those who had not made an online payment for digital media had paid for digital news in the previous year. In contrast, 28% of those who had bought digital media online had also paid for digital news. The correlation between payment for digital news and online payment for digital media varies only slightly with the type of media purchased. Those who had bought e-books were slightly more likely than average (30%) to have also paid for digital news, the rate of those who had purchased games was equal to average and all the others were slightly less likely than average to have paid for digital news. Details are provided in **Figure 6.11**.

FIGURE 6.11: PAID FOR DIGITAL NEWS BY DIGITAL MEDIA BUYING EXPERIENCE (%)
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).
Q7b_2017. Thinking more generally, which of the following types of digital media (if any) have you paid for online in the last year?

COMMENTARY

PAYING FOR NEWS IN A WORLD OF CHOICE

Richard Bean
Acting Chairman, the Australian Communication and Media Authority

It is clear that as content, platforms and devices proliferate, the way in which Australians consume news is changing. It is also clear that they don't like paying for it.

Australia's traditional media players remain the most significant suppliers of online access to news. However Australia's online news market has experienced significant growth since the launch of Australian versions of international news brands such as *HuffPost Australia* (launched 2015), *Buzzfeed* (launched 2014), *Daily Mail* (launched 2014) and most recently *The New York Times* (launched 2017). Moreover social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are increasingly used as an alternative access point for news, particularly by younger Australians.

Much of the online news available to Australians is available without monetary payment (though whether it should be characterised as 'free' is a nice question). This year's *Digital News Report: Australia* shows that although the percentage of Australians who paid for digital news in the preceding year rose from 10% to 13% and 83% of Australians report getting all the news they want from 'free' sources.

Interestingly and challengingly, the reluctance of Australians to pay for digital *news* can be contrasted with their attitude to digital *entertainment*. As at December 2016, 30% of Australians subscribed to video on demand services generally and one in four Australian homes had a Netflix subscription[1]. It seems that we are happy to shop around and pay for drama, comedy and documentaries to supplement our free-to-air broadcast consumption but we are almost entirely unwilling to substitute or supplement our traditional free or subscriber news sources for or with online subscriptions. A key factor in our reluctance is our long history of access to abundant and quality free news including that offered by free-to-air commercial television and radio services as well as Australia's national broadcasters the ABC and SBS. If audiences are used to getting their news for free – a long history of newspaper subscription notwithstanding – whether on the nightly TV news or radio news bulletins, then they may well ask ***why should I pay***? Of course we also have a shorter history of the internet being generally regarded as a 'free' domain.

Recent research from overseas explored the factors behind paying for news. The Media Insight Project in the USA found that perception of the importance of news may play a role in the willingness to pay for news: 60% of those who do pay regarded news as very or extremely important, compared to 37% of those who do not pay for news. The research also found that people are drawn to subscribe to news where a particular source excels at coverage of particular topics. Twenty-six per cent of those who use a free source of news said that they may begin to pay for it if publishers can meet their specific needs: content matters[2].

The commercial challenges facing traditional news media companies internationally and in Australia are well documented. In this context, the Australian Senate recently appointed a select committee to inquire into the future of public interest journalism[3]. The Chair of the committee noted the challenges for the future of Australian journalism and that "there is a role for government and policy makers to create a vibrant, free and independent industry"[4] . That role needs to be approached and discharged with care. Experience suggests that any government interventions in the contemporary media world will require a deft touch and a dynamism to match that of contemporary media itself.

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Richard Bean was appointed Deputy Chairman of the ACMA in 2010 for a five year term. In 2015 his appointment was extended for a further two years to October 2017. He has been Acting Chairman since 27 February 2016. Before joining the ACMA he was general counsel and company secretary at wireless broadband infrastructure and ISP owner Unwired Group Limited.

7 TRUST IN NEWS: AUSTRALIA

CAROLINE FISHER
GLEN FULLER

Digital News Report: Australia 2017 **takes a more detailed look at the issue of trust through a range of related questions. In doing so, we reveal the impact that trust, particularly low levels of trust, is having on the way Australians choose to keep themselves informed.**

- **Trust in news stable but low at 42%.**
- **56% of online news users try to avoid the news.**
- **Only 27% believe social media helps them distinguish fact from fiction.**
- **Greater news literacy corresponds with greater levels of trust in news in general.**

GENERAL TRUST IN NEWS IS STABLE

Despite concern about the rise of 'fake news' and political leaders publicly criticising journalists, overall or general trust in news in Australia has remained reasonably steady and low over the past twelve months, shifting slightly from 43% in 2016 to 42% in 2017. Survey participants were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement: 'I think you can trust most news most of the time'.

Figure 7.1 below shows that 42% either agreed or strongly agreed with that statement; 25% disagreed or strongly disagreed; and 33% neither agreed, nor disagreed, and were therefore non-committal about whether they trusted the news most of the time or not. Similar results were found in the 2016 survey.

42% OF RESPONDENTS EITHER AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED THAT THEY COULD TRUST MOST NEWS MOST OF THE TIME

FIGURE 7.1: GENERAL TRUST IN NEWS, 2016-17 (%)

Q6. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: I think you can trust most news most of the time: Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree.

HOW DOES AUSTRALIA COMPARE INTERNATIONALLY?

Out of the 36 territories surveyed in this year's report, Sweden and Hong Kong have the same level of general trust in news as Australia at 42% placing them squarely in the middle of the countries surveyed (**Figure 7.2**). Finland is the most trusting (62%), and Greece the least (23%).

In comparison to the English speaking countries of the USA, Ireland, UK and Canada, Australia continues to have the second lowest level of general trust in news, as it did in 2016.

FIGURE 7.2: GENERAL TRUST IN NEWS, BY COUNTRY (%)

Q6. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: I think you can trust most news most of the time: Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree.

GENERAL TRUST IN NEWS BY MAIN SOURCE

When we look at trust in news by the main source of news used by the respondents a very different picture emerges. **Figure 7.3** shows that in 2017, those who rely on social media (32%) and online sources (37%) as their main source of news are less likely to trust most news most of the time.

Whereas, those who rely on traditional news sources such as newspapers (52%), TV (50%) and radio (48%) as their main source of news continue to have the highest general trust in news.

Not only do newspaper readers have higher trust in news most of the time, **Figure 7.3** shows trust in news by newspaper consumers has increased since 2016 from 48% to 52% this year.

This is in stark contrast to a drop in trust by those who use social media as their main source of news which fell from 37% in 2016 to 32% in 2017. This suggests that those who rely on social media as their main source of news may have lower levels of trust in news in general.

NEITHER TRUST NOR DISTRUST THE NEWS

As **Figure 7.1** shows, there has been a slight increase in those who neither trust nor distrust the news most of the time. This is more clearly demonstrated when we look at main source of news used.

Figure 7.4 shows a rise in the number who say they neither trust nor distrust the news by those who rely on social media, radio and TV news bulletins or programmes as their main source of news.

TRUST BY THOSE WHO USE SOCIAL MEDIA AS THEIR MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS FELL FROM 37% IN 2016 TO 32% IN 2017

POLARISATION OF TRUST

One of the most interesting findings is a polarisation in trust by those who rely on 24hour TV news services to be informed. **Figures 7.3** and **7.5** show that in the twelve months between surveys there has been both an increase in trust (43% to 50%) and an increase in distrust (24% to 28%) by those who mainly use 24hour news services, with fewer who 'neither trust nor distrust' the news shown in **Figure 7.4**.

This suggests a polarisation of trust amongst consumers who feel more strongly one way or the other, leaving fewer ambivalent consumers in the middle. Those who consume TV news bulletins or programmes as their main source of news have actually headed in the opposite direction, which indicates there might be specific qualities of 24hour news television channels producing polarisation.

FIGURE 7.3: 2016/2017 GENERAL TRUST IN NEWS BY MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS (AGREE, %)
Q6. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: I think you can trust most news most of the time: Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree.

FIGURE 7.4: 2016/2017 GENERAL TRUST IN NEWS BY MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS (NEITHER, %)
Q6. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: I think you can trust most news most of the time: Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree.

FIGURE 7.5: 2016/2017 GENERAL TRUST IN NEWS BY MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS (DISAGREE, %)
Q6. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: I think you can trust most news most of the time: Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree.

GENERAL TRUST IN NEWS BY NUMBER OF SOURCES

As the number of sources increases so do the levels of trust in most news most of the time. There is also a corresponding decrease in ambivalence regarding trust in news represented by a decrease in the number of 'neither' responses.

We suggest that the number of sources indicates levels of news literacy. Therefore the sixth key finding is that greater news literacy corresponds to greater levels of trust in news in general.

FIGURE 7.6: GENERAL TRUST IN NEWS BY NUMBER OF SOURCES (TRADITIONAL AND ONLINE) (%)
Q6. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: I think you can trust most news most of the time: Strongly disagree; Tend to disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to agree; Strongly agree.

NEWS AVOIDANCE

Trust in news was also found to be a factor in whether people try to avoid the news. More than half of the survey participants (56%) said they avoid the news either often, sometimes or occasionally (see **Figure 7.7**). 42% said they never try to avoid it. Those who never avoid the news were also found to have higher trust and interest in news than those who try to avoid it.

Participants who identify as left wing are also more likely to avoid the news than right wing consumers.

The key reasons given for avoiding the news were related to the negative impact news can have on mood; the distracting and time consuming nature of news; and not being able to rely on its veracity.

FIGURE 7.7: MAIN REASONS FOR NEWS AVOIDANCE (%)
Q1dii_2017. You said that you find yourself trying to avoid news. Which, if any, of the following are reasons why you actively try to avoid news? Please select all that apply. *Multiple responses merged to single variable.*

56% OF RESPONDENTS SAID THEY AVOID THE NEWS EITHER OFTEN, SOMETIMES OR OCCASIONALLY

FACT vs. FICTION

Low trust in social media was further demonstrated in responses to questions asking how much survey participants agreed or disagreed that both social media and traditional news media do 'a good job in helping me to distinguish fact from fiction'.

Figure 7.8 shows that only 27% said social media helped them separate fact from fiction, compared to 40% in relation to traditional news media. Once again, more than a third of participants were undecided about both social media and traditional news media doing a better job in this regard.

FIGURE 7.8: DISTINGUISHING FACT FROM FICTION (%)
Q6. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. The news media does a good job in helping me distinguish fact from fiction/ Social media does a good job in helping me distinguish fact from fiction.

SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION

27% PREFERRED SOCIAL MEDIA TO HELP THEM

40% PREFERRED TRADITIONAL NEWS MEDIA

GREATER NEWS LITERACY CORRESPONDS TO GREATER LEVELS OF TRUST IN NEWS IN GENERAL

'TRUST' - IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Participants were given the chance to explain in their own words why they felt this way. Support for news media was based on good professional standards including honesty, fairness and verification.

Whereas support for social media was based on the wisdom of the crowd – e.g. the wide range of voices – and relying on the crowd to fact check and comment. Conversely, people who didn't think the news media helped them separate fact from fiction highlighted issues of bias, sensationalism, and vested commercial/political interests.

Those who disagreed that social media helped distinguish fact from fiction overwhelmingly pointed to the 'ignorance of the crowd' e.g. the mass of unverified information, personal opinion and agendas. The comments below represent the common sentiments

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

You said that you agree that the news media does a good job in helping you distinguish fact from fiction. Why is that?

"The news I listen to is even handed"

"Detailed story with proper verification"

You said that you disagree that the news media does a good job in helping you distinguish fact from fiction. Why is that?

"All reporting is influenced by commercial/political bias"

"Reporting standards seem to have slipped over the last decade or two, and reporting bias has increased markedly over the last decade. Sensationalism, and political agenda seems to drive news content more than actual news, and advertising has crept into news content"

You said that you agree that social media does a good job in helping you distinguish fact from fiction. Why is that?

"It is the voice of people I know and they let me know what is actually happening"

"Social media always has the latest and breaking news"

You said that you disagree that social media does a good job in helping you distinguish fact from fiction. Why is that?

"Much of what is written on social media is just hearsay or gossip"

"Too much false news"

PROFILES OF TRUST

We conducted a demographic analysis of the 2017 respondents to try and find out who generally trusts the news; who distrusts it; and who is undecided about whether to trust it or not.

1. The **'Trusters'** (42%). Respondents who said they think they trust most of the news most of the time are more likely to:
   - Have a high interest in news.
   - Access news more than once a day.
   - Access multiple sources of news.
   - Earn middle to high incomes.
   - Have attended high school or less, or had some under graduate university education.
   - Be 25+ years or older, with those aged 65+ years displaying the highest trust.
   - Rely on television or newspapers (print and online) for their main source of news.
   - Talk to colleagues face to face about items in the news rather than share or comment on them on social media.

2. The **'Distrusters'** (25%). The quarter of respondents who said they don't think they can trust most of the news most of the time are more likely to:
   - Have either a low or high income.
   - Have had some university or post graduate education.
   - Have a high interest in news, but less than 'trusters'.
   - Access news more than once a day.
   - Be male.
   - Between 18-24 years.
   - Often avoid the news.
   - Access their news via social media and/or online sources.
   - Comment and share news items on social media.

3. The **'Neithers'** (33%). This large group who neither agreed nor disagreed that they could trust most news most of the time is harder to define, but they are more closely aligned with 'distrusters' than 'trusters'. There is little difference across income and education levels. That meaning those who have a post graduate qualification are just as likely to neither trust nor distrust the news as the low educated. The same applies to high and low income earners. They are relatively evenly split between those who access news more than once a day and those who access less than that. However, they are slightly more likely to:
   - Be aged between 18-24 years.
   - Female
   - Use television, online and social media as their main sources of news.
   - Have a slightly higher interest in news, than a low interest.
   - Sometimes or occasionally, avoid the news.

The biggest difference is reflected in their physical engagement with news. They are much less likely to share and comment on news, or participate in an online poll than 'trusters' or 'distrusters'. 'Neithers' read a news item, neither trust nor distrust it, and move on to the next item without commenting on it or sharing it with friends.

WHAT IS 'TRUST'?

The responses to these questions present a complex picture of trust and how it manifests across different segments of society and impacts on the behaviour of news consumers.

It must be stressed that participants in this survey were not provided with a definition of trust. Instead we assumed that they adopted the common usage definition which relates to the ability to believe in something or someone as reliable and truthful. The responses in this report appear to generally support this interpretation. However, as discussed in last year's *Digital News Report: Australia*, conceptions of trust in news media are multifaceted and will change depending on which element of news is being referred to: the source, the message or the medium[1].

In addition to being directly asked whether they 'trust' the news, survey respondents were also asked related questions about news avoidance and separating fact from fiction, which both contain elements of trust. The data have revealed a relatively steady but low level of general trust in news at 42%. But **they have highlighted significant changes in trust by people who mainly use social media news sources.** Not only has there been a drop in trust but also an increase in number of people who neither trust nor distrust the news most of the time.

Given the concern about fake news perhaps this shift is not surprising. Nor is it surprising that consumers have less faith in social media's ability to help them sort fact from fiction. What is telling is that only 40% think the news media can do a better job in that regard.

This lack of faith is underlined by other elements of dissatisfaction with the way news is reported, and which is leading many consumers to avoid the news. The respondents pointed to the negativity of the content, doubts about its truthfulness, and the distracting and time consuming nature of news consumption, as some of the factors that are turning them away.

Those who consume news from multiple sources have higher levels of trust in news generally compared to those who consume from a more limited number of sources. One dimension of media literacy is understood in terms of the number of sources of information consumed[2].

We therefore interpret the use of multiple sources and higher levels of trust in news in general as indicating greater levels of news media literacy.

While much attention is paid to those who clearly say they either trust or distrust the news, there is very little attention given to the large portion of Australians – roughly one-third – who say they 'neither trust nor distrust' the news. It is not clear whether this position reflects indecision on the part of the consumer or whether they are simply non-committal.

A closer look at this 30% of news consumers reveals they come from all sections of society, though are slightly more likely to be young, female and educated. They tend to live in cities and are more likely to rely on social media than traditional news sources. Despite neither trusting nor distrusting, many of these people have a high interest in news and access it more than once a day. However they tend to share news less via social media. This lack of sharing could simply reflect a non-committal stance toward the information, or it could reflect a sense of caution about spreading news stories they neither trust nor distrust.

> NOT ONLY HAS THERE BEEN A DROP IN TRUST BUT ALSO AN INCREASE IN THOSE WHO NEITHER TRUST NOR DISTRUST THE NEWS MOST OF THE TIME

Either way, these people reflect a paradox which has been long identified by uses and gratifications researchers in the field of communication[3], the paradox being that people regularly consume media they do not necessarily trust. They consume it for a range of reasons, such as being able to share information with friends, and to be entertained or to relax, rather than being driven by a desire to become an informed citizen. In a global environment of information uncertainty and low trust in journalism, this is perhaps good news.

What is clear from the data is that people are beginning to seek respite from the onslaught of negative information over which they feel they have no control, and are uncertain about its veracity.

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1 Fisher, C. (2016) The trouble with 'trust'in news media. *Communication Research and Practice,* 2 (4):451-465.
2 Potter, W. J. (2013). *Media Literacy* (7 ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
3 Tsfati, Y. & Cappella, J. (2005) Why Do People Watch News They Do Not Trust? The Need for Cognition as a Moderator in the Association Between News Media Skepticism and Exposure. *Media Psychology* 7: 251-271.

NEWS MOMENTS OF 2017

FRIDAY MAY 26: Actress Rebel Wilson arrives at the Supreme Court in Melbourne with her legal team. Wilson is suing Bauer Media for publishing articles that painted her as a serial liar.

IMAGE: AAP/DAVID CROSLING © 2017 AAP

COMMENTARY

A BROKEN RELATIONSHIP

Karen Barlow
Politics Editor, *HuffPost Australia*

Trust.

It is intangible, but reputations are built on it, relationships can founder over it and elections are fought over it.

So what is going on with our main instruments of information? A hungry audience is tuning out of the news and tuning in elsewhere. Just when we need to get our facts straight, trust is low and it is not budging. Reality is under question. US President Donald Trump declared journalists were the 'enemy of the people'.

Less than half the adult Australian population (42%), according to the latest findings of the News & Media Research Centre's *Digital News Report: Australia 2017*, trust the news. More than half of people online actively avoid the news, mostly because it makes them feels bad or, yes, they distrust it.

It's more than an anti-establishment mood; it matches research in the 2017 *Edelman Trust Barometer*[1] that found – through surveying 33,000 people – that public trust in the media around the world, and just about everything else, at a record low. In fact, Australia is highlighted as having particularly low trust in the media[2]. How did we get to this?

People are consuming more news and information than ever before but thanks to the online juggernaut, industry business troubles and media convergence, the barriers between reportage, journalism and commentary are being broken down. As a career journalist, it feels like the walls of the dam are crumbling and every story or blog I do plugs a hole.

Taking a position or being a 'keyboard warrior' is seductive and may be good for a social media profile but ultimately it is self-destructive. All journalists have are their reputations and once these are compromised, the game is over. The speed and wide audience of social media promise so much, especially during crises like recent terror attacks in the United Kingdom and Australia. But the *Digital News Report: Australia* finds trust among those who mainly use social media news source dropping. And the number of people who neither trust nor distrust the news most of the time is growing. In fact news consumers appear to trust the sharer over the source. What does the keyboard warrior know over the source?

Is this deserved? As ever, it depends on what or whom you read or listen to.

Major news outlets are now refusing to use some of the social media output of the US President as he uses "unconfirmed information" from favoured news outlets. Whether it is correctly applied or not, the 'fake news' tag is multiplying in Trumpian proportions. Co-opted by Australian politicians such as Treasurer Scott Morrison and One Nation leader Pauline Hanson, no-one denies fake news exists and circulates as people seek social media infamy or to push an agenda, but it does not and cannot exist in all the places it is accused of being in.

News flash!
Fake news, as an accusation, cannot be trusted.

If it comes from a politician's mouth it is likely to be a lazy deflection or diversion. It should always be questioned. The politicians' own credibility is on the line as their claims are speedily contradicted and recorded evidence is inexplicably denied. In Australia, never before have people had less faith in politics[3].

The media needs to be questioned too. It always has been. Nothing has changed there. But the time-honoured and often justified practice of picking holes in reportage has turned into painting a whole story as 'FALSE". Such social media hollers or howlers are now RT'd with the speed and devastation of the Spanish Flu.

Karen Barlow joined *HuffPost Australia* as Politics Editor in June 2015. A former journalist for ABC's now defunct Australia Network and Radio Australia, she was most recently reporting as political correspondent for SBS's Canberra bureau, a role she concluded in 2014.

If a source like a US President cannot be trusted – or the source is using untrustworthy sources – the news cycle is corrupted. And reputable media outlets like the *Washington Post*, CNN and the *Sydney Morning Herald* are having their reputations trashed, accused of lying, 'groupthink' and running 'jihads' against the government of the day. This is happening as politicians increasingly use social media to get around traditional media and present an 'unfiltered' message to the public, even by their parties secretly or clumsily using 'bots' to boost support and farm out propaganda.

Campaign journalism certainly exists – and it may be hard to work out the difference between a report, an opinion piece and a biting bit of satire – but quality public interest journalism is vital for a functioning democracy. At its most base level, it can expose howling hypocrisy, waste and stupidity. It also shines a light in dark places and holds corrupting power accountable. And, apart from #advert, how can we tell these days the difference between a legitimate story and a sponsored message? What is left is a grinding doubt and a concerted attempt to redefine reality.

It is good to be skeptical but if the trust is gone in news, what is the point of it?

People still want information and are increasingly going to other non-traditional sources for news. This distrust is creating a hole and it is being filled by citizen journalism but it is also fueling those 'fake' yarns.

The distrust with the online space is evident and falling. According to the *Digital News Report: Australia* survey findings, a third of those who rely on social media (32%) and just over a third of those who use online sources (37%) as their main source of news are less likely to trust most news most of the time. Newspaper readers (52%), TV viewers (50%) and radio listeners (48%) have the highest general trust in news. There is a jump in trust for newspapers of 4% since 2016 but it is hardly a convincing result.

News fact checking is one remedy, from within media organisations and without. And the efforts can prove widely popular. But for outlets, fact checking takes much needed resources from the main news game of reporting and investigating. This business model is yet to proven. And what's left is what's available to all people who don't like what they see, read and hear: the big switch off.

While more people are turning off and tuning out, there's a mysterious middle third of news users who neither trust nor distrust the news. Who are these people? Like elections that are traditionally fought 'in the middle' could they point to winning back trust in news? Are they an untapped audience for a potential new approach to the news? The *Digital News Report: Australia* finds they are a wide group of non-committed regular media users that is more likely than not to be a young female educated city dweller with a high interest in the news. But, of course, that is not the whole story.

It is easy to say 'don't lose trust in the first place' but it is too late for the media now anyway. Like a broken relationship, regaining trust is not easy. Most relationship advice in this area urges an apology or acknowledgment of wrongdoing. Yeah nah, that is unlikely to happen.

But honesty is being called for here. The news media has to be clearer than ever in its reporting. Facts need to be checked and links, where possible, need to be made to sources. Errors need to be acknowledged, and nobody likes to know how sausages are made, but the construction of news needs to be demystified. People think it is staged and in many ways it is. And just as the major media organisations like the ABC, Fairfax and News Corp, go through yet another round of redundancies, experience in journalism is being called for. Where are all our mid-level reporters?

Good, ethical, unbiased public interest journalism has never felt more important and needed.

Trust me.

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[1] Edelman, 15 Jan 2017, '2017 Edelman TRUST BAROMETER Reveals Global Implosion of Trust' edelman.com/news/2017-edelman-trust-barometer-reveals-global-implosion, viewed 07 Jun 2017.

[2] World Economic Forum, 16 Jan 2017, 'Don't trust anyone? You're not alone', weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/dont-trust-anyone-youre-not-alone, viewed 07 Jun 2017.

[3] ABC, 09 Jan 2017, 'Ian McAllister on why people are losing faith in politicians ' abc.net.au/7.30/content/2017/s4601875.htm, viewed 07 Jun 2017.

GENDER

AND NEWS

NEWS MOMENTS OF 2017

SATURDAY JANUARY 21: Thousands take part in Sydney's Women's Solidarity March in support of equal rights. Hundreds of rallies took place in over 30 countries around the world following the inauguration of US President Donald Trump.

IMAGE: AAP/DAN HIMBRECHTS © 2017 AAP

COMMENTARY

A VESSEL FOR FRUIT

Jacqueline Maley
Columnist and Senior Writer, Fairfax Media

A couple of years ago the editor of the Fairfax Media website *Essential Baby* – which, as its name suggests, covers all things baby and motherhood – showed me a chart that graphed the time of day its readers logged on. The biggest spike in readership was in the deepest dark of the night, around 3am. This is in sharp contrast to the peak readership times for general news sites which tend to be during the morning commute, lunch time and the evening commute. But new mothers keep a very different schedule and their work day is pretty far removed from a white collar commuter's.

Of course it has ever been thus but it is only recently that publishers have realised they must tailor their journalism to follow women instead of just presenting their wares in the old model which tacitly presumes a male reader – one who keeps regular working hours and has plenty of quiet time alone. But catering to female readers on their own terms is only one half of the equation. Perhaps one of the reasons female readers engage less with traditional news than their male counterparts is that they don't see themselves reflected there much. And when we do see women represented, particularly in leadership roles, it's not always in a fair light.

The prime ministership of Julia Gillard was a pivotal moment in media portrayals of powerful women in this country and we in the media did not acquit ourselves well. From the depictions of Gillard as the ambitious former union leader with her barren fruit bowl to the raking-over of her romantic past and the Alan Jones-coined 'Juliar' moniker, those years were a slow-moving sexist car crash. Gillard herself seemed torn between ignoring the gender issue as she tried to rise above it and then – when that didn't work – openly acknowledging her femininity (many would say for political purposes) in the notorious anti-misogyny diatribe against then-Opposition leader Tony Abbott.

Five years after the 'misogyny' speech it is tempting to believe we've moved on, but when Gladys Berejiklian was anointed as NSW Premier earlier this year she turned up at her first press conference and faced questions about her childlessness. But this time it was slightly different. Female journalists denounced this line of questioning and the letters pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald* showed that our readers found it insulting not just to the Premier herself, but to voters' intelligence. They didn't care about the Premier's childlessness. They didn't think it would have any impact on her ability to do the job.

Progress is incremental and the more female journalists we have in leadership positions within newsrooms, the sooner such gendered assumptions will be toppled. Women now outnumber men in journalism but they tend to be younger, earn less and occupy less senior positions than men according to a 2013 study by University of the Sunshine Coast[1]. And what is a female journalist's reward for prominence or a high profile? Women journalists are disproportionately bullied on social media. A 2016 Media Arts and Entertainment Alliance survey of over 1000 journalists found online trolling of women journalists was commonplace[2]. Television journalists face an extra level of discrimination: female TV hosts will tell you their email inboxes are full of viewer 'feedback' about their appearance with detailed commentary on outfit choices and makeup. Australian television networks are so notorious for axing their female stars after they return from maternity leave that we even have our own verb for it: 'to bone'. This contribution to the lexicon reportedly came via former Channel Nine boss Eddie Maguire who is claimed to have said that he wanted to 'bone' the then-*Today* show host Jessica Rowe in 2006[3].

It all makes for a grim history. But there is a great deal of hope for women in the Australian media. Internet disruption and the splintering of readership mean that publishers are financially forced to hunt female readers down and deliver news that fits the unique rhythm of their lives. Increasing numbers of female journalists mean that the sexist claptrap that has underpinned generations of reporting on women in power is increasingly laughed out of town. And some media companies – notably the ABC – are beginning to realise that the auto-pilot promotion of middle-aged white males into senior roles needs to end. One day, hopefully not too far off, a fruit bowl will just be seen for what it is: a mere vessel for fruit.

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1 Hanusch, F. 'Women overtake men in the media, but not in pay or power', *The Conversation* (27 May 2013) theconversation.com/women-overtake-men-in-the-media-but-not-in-pay-or-power-14479 viewed 12 Jun 2017.

2 Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance (16 Mar 2016) 'Women in media survey reveals entrenched gender pay gap' meaa.org/news/women-in-media-survey-reveals-entrenched-gender-pay-gap viewed 12 Jun 2017.

3 Leys, N. (29 Sep 2011) 'Eddie McGuire boning or burning for Jessica?' *The Australian* theaustralian.com.au/business/media/eddie-mcguire-boning-or-burning-for-jessica/news-story/e98946dabf67a7fd6ed4af3be79a0650 viewed 12 Jun 2017.

Jacqueline Maley spent several years in the parliamentary press gallery and has covered several election campaigns. She has won a Kennedy Award for Outstanding Columnist and was a 2016 Walkley Award nominee for Analysis/Opinion. She is a panelist on ABC's *Insiders* and *The Drum* and a part-time ABC radio host.

NEWS MOMENTS OF 2017

THURSDAY MAY 25: Director Patty Jenkins, left, and actress Gal Gadot arrive at the world premiere of "Wonder Woman" at the Pantages Theatre in Los Angeles. The film grossed $103.1 million in North America over its debut weekend, a figure that easily surpassed industry expectations, set a new record for a film directed by a woman and bested all previous stand-alone female superhero movies put together.

IMAGE: AP via AAP/JORDAN STRAUSS

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8 GENDERED SPACES OF NEWS CONSUMPTION

MICHAEL JENSEN
VIRGINIA HAUSSEGGER

The data from our survey provide evidence of gender-based differences in both how and where men and women engage with the news. These results also might provoke an interrogation into how news is presented, and whether different domains of news address the concerns of women and men differentially. Specifically we find the following:

- **Overall, men are more likely than women to consume news multiple times a day.**
- **The most common place for women to consume news is in communal spaces at home; elsewhere in the house they tend to be more nomadic news consumers using smartphones and tablets.**
- **More men use their smartphone or tablet to consume news in the bathroom or toilet than women use mobile devices to access news at work.**
- **Both men and women claim to avoid news but men claim to avoid news mostly as a means of asserting control over their lives, whereas women tend to cite more emotional reasons.**
- **Differences in the kinds of news men and women are interested in are most significant among soft news categories.**

The portability of news and the continuous news cycle increase the flexibility of news access, which may make news consumption fit better into gendered household routines. The increased choice of when and how a consumer can access news also means those women who may have previously been restricted by household schedules now have a greater ability to fit news into their daily lives. This may also mean that both men and women increase the frequency of their news consumption.

In earlier times the static schedule of news broadcasts and the delivery of print news led to fairly regularized intervals of news consumption which were long believed to favour men as more avid consumers of news than women, owing to traditional gendered distributions of labour in the home which often permitted men to consume news while women were preoccupied with domestic tasks.

But today the ready availability of news online has changed the temporalities and spatialities of news consumption and therefore the behaviours of some of our survey respondents around how, when, and where they access news.

NEWS CONSUMPTION

News consumption was measured on a scale ranging from 10 or more times per day to less than once a week. The responses were differentiated by gender. A very clear pattern appears: men are more likely to consume news more than once per day whereas women are more likely to consume news once a day or less, as **Figure 8.1** indicates. If we consider age as a function of news consumption, we find that younger news consumers are among the most active as are those in the highest income brackets.

For those survey participants who are highly interested in news, there is little difference in interest between males and females among the 45+ years age groups. Females and younger participants tend to use social media for news consumption whereas males nominate newspapers and online news as their main sources of news. Females, older participants and those with less formal education were most interested in news about crime, justice and security as were rural participants (see *Access & Consumption* section).

FIGURE 8.1: FREQUENCY OF NEWS CONSUMPTION DIFFERENTIATED BY GENDER (# RESPONSES)
Q1b. 'Typically how often do you access news? By news we mean national, international, regional/local, and other topical events accessed by any platform'.

GENDERED SPACES

The spaces in which women and men access news may impact how they consume it and the extent to which they are likely to focus without interruptions. Specifically looking at digital technologies and the greater portability than, for example, television and sometimes radio, we can examine the extent to which patterns of news consumption are divided by gender. Respondents were asked about their use of a computer (desktop or laptop), a smartphone, and a tablet across a variety of spaces where daily life takes place. These include: at work; at home in a bathroom or toilet; in communal spaces of the home, such as family areas; in personal spaces at home, such as a study or private reading area; in bed, while outside when out and about; and while travelling on both private and public transport.

FIGURE 8.2: SPACES OF ONLINE NEWS CONSUMPTION DIFFERENTIATED BY GENDER (# RESPONSES)
Q9a. You say you have used the following [devices] (smartphone, tablet, desktop/laptop) to access the news in the last week. In what locations have you used these devices to access news?

These patterns reveal significant differences across spaces, as well as across technologies in those spaces. The most common area of news consumption is communal space (see **Figure 8.2**). This is the only space where women consume news more than men (note: slightly more women consume news in bed than men but this difference is not statistically significant).

In contrast to communal spaces, private spaces in the home tend to be more used by men to consume news, and they are more inclined than women to use a computer in these spaces. In general, women tend to use portable devices to consume news at home which suggests a more nomadic engagement with news than is the case for men.

The main exception to that is in the toilet where more men use smartphones and tablets than women use either of these devices to access news while they are at work. The workplace is one of the spaces where we find the biggest gender differences in news consumption. This may reflect occupational differences between men and women.

THE BIGGEST GENDER DIFFERENCES IN NEWS CONSUMPTION OCCUR IN THE WORKPLACE

SUBJECTS OF NEWS INTEREST

Not only are men and women consuming news at different rates and in different spaces, **Figure 8.3** shows that they tend to be more interested in different subjects when they consume the news.

These data show that men tend to express more interest in 'hard news' such as politics, international news, or business news while women tend to consume more 'soft news' such as entertainment and lifestyle news. However, these differences should not be overdrawn.

If we combine those who are very interested and those who are extremely interested across each of these categories of news, we find that there is broader interest in international news for both genders than in either of the soft news categories. Further, based on gendered patterns of socialisation, sports news may be thought of as a form of soft news and men are extremely or very interested in sports at a higher rate than women are for either of the other soft news categories.

FIGURE 8.3: INTEREST IN CATEGORIES OF NEWS DIFFERENTIATED BY GENDER (# RESPONSES)
Q2. How interested are you in the following types of news?

NEWS AVOIDANCE

News consumption is only half the story. Women and men avoid the news at different rates and for different reasons (**Figure 8.4**).

FIGURE 8.4: FREQUENCY OF NEWS AVOIDANCE BY GENDER (%)
Q1di. Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid the news these days?

Figure 8.4 indicates that women are more likely to avoid news than men, while men are more likely than women to say they never avoid news. The reasons for news avoidance also tend to fit certain patterns (see **Figure 8.5**). Women tend to cite emotional factors – it is upsetting, it impacts one's mood and provokes a feeling of helplessness, and it cannot be trusted – as reasons for avoiding news. Whereas men tend to cite reasons concerning a need to exert control over their lives – that is, they avoid news when it is distracting; it may provoke argument; or they have a lack of time.

FIGURE 8.5: MOTIVES FOR NEWS AVOIDANCE AMONG MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS (# RESPONSES)
Q1dii. You said that you find yourself trying to avoid news. Which, if any, of the following are reasons why you actively try to avoid the news? Please select all that apply. *Multiple responses merged to single variable. Excluding 'don't know' and 'other'.*

THERE IS BROADER INTEREST IN INTERNATIONAL NEWS THAN IN SOFT NEWS FOR BOTH GENDERS

A HIGH PROPORTION OF WOMEN AND MEN SAY THEY HAVE NO ENGAGEMENT WITH NEWS

NEWS ENGAGEMENT

It is increasingly important for news organizations to understand how their news stories are being shared. This issue has become more import since social media enable not only the consumption of news but also consumer distribution and dissemination of news.

In answer to our survey questions around men and women's engagement with news there are two outstanding responses with almost equal weight, and both in which women outnumber men. **Figure 8.6** shows a high proportion of women (and men) say they have no engagement with news. An almost equal number say they discuss news items with family and friends. There are some patterns of difference in the manner in which stories are engaged, though these are not terribly pronounced in these data. Men tend to share more stories via email, whereas women tend to engage with news in environments which are often more immediately social such as sharing stories on social media, commenting on stories on social media, or speaking face-to-face with others about the news. Men are more likely to blog about news than women, but blogging is the most limited form of engagement for either gender.

In summary, the two most significant differences between men and women when it comes to the consumption of news are the physical spaces in which they access news, and the reasons they give for avoiding news altogether.

FIGURE 8.6: MALE AND FEMALE ENGAGEMENT WITH NEWS (# RESPONSES)
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.

9 ESSAY: What's Gender got to do with it?

VIRGINIA HAUSSEGGER

As an ABC TV News presenter for some 15 years I developed a somewhat unhealthy fascination with what people do in the privacy of their homes. Initially it was their lounge-rooms, then it morphed into bedrooms, and by the time I signed off with my final "Enjoy your evening, goodnight" late last year, my fascination with private space had extended to people's bathrooms.

Now, thanks to the results of this year's *Digital News Report: Australia* I find myself contemplating their toilets as well! That's because how and where people consume news is increasingly of critical importance to those who produce it. And for good reason.

Way back in those unthinkably dark days prior to the miracle of 'the internet' and well before smartphones, the collective focus of any newsroom was first and foremost on the day's news stories. Informing that focus were somewhat vague assumptions around the news audience: who they were and what they wanted. Little thought was given to how our audience actually engaged with the news. Then along came the digital revolution and all that changed.

By early this decade the newsroom obsession with digital technology and delivery platforms made audience engagement the new primary focus for anyone who produces or disseminates news content. My former ABC boss, Mark Scott, wasn't kidding when he thrust his phone in the air and bellowed, "Mobile is eating the world. And it's eating news!" Right about then we all got busy studying click graphs.

However some of us news junkies had not given serious thought – until this year's survey – to how the rapid cycle of continuous news and the portability of digital devices not only changes where and when people consume news, but also how these advances might in fact play out differently for women and men. Most importantly, my team had a hunch that the increasing portability of news might possibly be giving women a news 'advantage'. And it turns out we were right.

Back in the mid-1980s when I began my television journalism career there was a comfortable certainty about 'the news'. It went to air at 7pm every night on the ABC or 6pm on a commercial station. It wasn't repeated and no-one was in the habit of recording it. If you missed it, you missed it. Which was a jolly shame because then – as now – the TV bulletin was the most popular and influential source of news for most Australians, providing a window to the wider world. And yet it was broadcast right at a time of night when many women were usually preoccupied with household matters and family dinners.

So what advantages do the 24/7 news cycle, the proliferation of news platforms and modes of news sharing offer to women? The answer is very simply – freedom. The freedom to choose how, when and where one consumes news gives women an inherent advantage that previous methods of news delivery were unable to do. Interestingly our data show clearly gendered spaces of news consumption: that is, men and women are consuming news in different places.

WOMEN ACCESS NEWS IN COMMUNAL SPACES IN THE HOME MORE THAN ANY OTHER PLACE

Two key things stand out here. First, women access news in communal spaces in the home – such as the family or lounge room – more than any other place. Second, more men access news on their smartphone or tablet in the bathroom and toilet than women use mobile devices to access news at work. If you think that might be a little odd, here's another finding our team didn't want to contemplate too deeply: a portion of men consuming news in the bathroom or loo are not just using phones or tablets, but a number are also using their laptops. In fact more men use laptops in the toilet or bathroom to access news than they do on public transport.

This is the first year that the *Digital News Report* has focused specifically on the gendered nature of news consumption, so without annual comparisons we can only paint a 'first glimpse' picture. But what appears to emerge through our study of gendered spaces of news consumption is a picture of a female news consumer who is somewhat nomadic, accessing news as she moves about the house; usually in shared spaces of the home in which she is no doubt being interrupted or possibly even multi-tasking.

MORE MEN ACCESS NEWS ON THEIR SMARTPHONE OR TABLET IN THE BATHROOM AND TOILET THAN WOMEN USE MOBILE DEVICES TO ACCESS NEWS AT WORK

However, despite the communal nature of her space, her access device – either a smartphone, tablet or computer – means she enjoys a greater freedom of personal choice over what news items she can tap into it, with less need to shield children from inappropriate content. And whilst consuming news, she is more inclined than her male counterpart to share and comment via social media: a finding that is perhaps not surprising given women under-40 are the most frequent users of social networking sites in Australia[1].

The male news consumer, on the other hand, would appear to be retreating to his private space where he can access news alone and uninterrupted. Although he is less inclined to share news on social media, he is a more active blogger about news issues and events. Interestingly both men and women consume news in bed more than at work, with women just slightly more interested in bed-time news than men.

THERE IS A DEMONSTRABLE NOMADIC SOCIABILITY TO FEMALE NEWS CONSUMPTION

So while our survey data paint a gender difference in where and how people access news, what about those pesky assumptions that suggest women are less frequent news consumers; greater new 'avoiders'; and prefer 'soft' over 'hard' news? As a long-time newsreader I am disappointed to learn that women are more inclined to avoid news than men. However I suspect there is something deeper at play here than simply emotion; more to do with women disengaging from news that doesn't reflect their lives or realities. And often it just doesn't represent women well at all: a recent 12-month analysis of 13,000 news articles across 18 Australian newspapers found the ratio of 'he' to 'she' was 3.4 to 1. This study found the top 20 names most commonly featured in news stories over a year were all male, with a female name ranking 21st on the ladder of the most-mentioned names[2].

As news consumers we need to rely on 'the news' to help make sense of the world around us, but when the world – as framed through the daily news – doesn't reflect women as equal players and participants... we're not just battling 'post-truth', but rather 'men's-truth'. Although there is yet to be a comprehensive, national study that fully examines the representation of women in news media, it is clear that women are relegated to the sidelines of news importance, and news organisations are key culprits for perpetuating gender stereotypes. While this remains the case, women's engagement with news will remain somewhat tenuous. Which is a problem for news brands.

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COMMENTARY

GENDER AND NEWS: MYTHS AND REALITY

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A narrative centred on gendered emotion often emerges in discussion around news avoidance, with women more likely to cite emotional reasons for avoiding the news – as was the case in our 2017 survey data. Yet, the concept is rarely unpacked to fully consider this reflex. Moreover while previous research has shown that negative news elicits different physiological responses in men and women, we're yet to understand what specific emotions triggered such reactions.

The oft-cited claim that women consume less news than men has become a widely accepted fact even though empirical investigations in the Australian context are scarce[1]. The figures that are available most often provide surface level snapshots into news consumption and while these show us that some differences do indeed exist between genders, they cannot tell much about the deeper reasons for why it is so.

Our survey data show that men access news more often than women in any one day; but not for how long each access lasts. Nor do we know whether the higher proportion of women who access news only once a day may be doing so for a longer, more sustained news consumption period. Interestingly enough, according to Screen Australia[2] women spend more time than men viewing free-to-air television and it would appear women have led the growth in consumer preference for news from entertainment breakfast shows rather than traditional news bulletins[3].

Political interest has been shown to be a key motivational factor behind news consumption and as such is an important predictor of news media use over time[4]. Therefore we must look at news consumption in the broader context of women and politics. Historically the nexus between women and politics has been a contentious issue, with women often described as less politically active than men.

Factors such as work status, lower access to socio-economic resources, lower levels of political interest, lack of time, and different gender socialisation processes have all been used to explain the perceived lower levels of political engagement. While these claims have been widely challenged, with many arguing that women aren't actually less active than men and that the gender differences mainly exist across different modes of participation, the overall narrative of passive women has been persistent[5,6].

While some Australian public news broadcasters are making a concerted effort to improve the gender balance in news items[7] news organisations continue to use male experts as sources at a much higher rate. Political reporting remains a largely male pursuit and studies from English-speaking countries repeatedly show a gender bias in story allocation[8].

Female journalists are more likely to report human interest and health-related stories while political news stories are dominated by male reporters and commentators[9]. Currently in Australia less than a handful of senior political commentators and opinion writers are women, a fact which is starkly highlighted during the media coverage of federal elections and budgets when television panel discussions are heavily male-dominated.

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BACKGROUND - DIGITAL NEWS REPORT: AUSTRALIA 2017

This is the third in a series of annual reports which tracks changes in news consumption in Australia over time, particularly within the digital space. The Australian study was conducted with approval from University of Canberra Human Research Ethics Committee SSD/CUREC1A/14-224.

The Australian survey forms part of a global study by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Sponsors of this year's global study include Google, BBC Global News, Ofcom, Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), Media Industry Research Foundation of Finland, Fritt Ord Foundation in Norway, Korea Press Foundation, Edelman UK, and academic sponsors at the Hans Bredow Institute, Hamburg, Navarra University in Spain, Roskilde University in Denmark, the School of Journalism at the Paris Institute of Political Science, University of Canberra and Université Laval in Canada.

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