

Social Media Ban:

The Impact On

Young People's

News Engagement

A report on a survey of 1,027 Australians aged 10–17 conducted in February 2026



WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Institute for Culture
and Society



Digital Media
Research Centre



UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA

NEWS AND MEDIA
RESEARCH CENTRE

Executive Summary

The debate around the social media ban has focused almost entirely on mental health and online safety. This report shows that the ban is jeopardising young Australians' access to news, and this is an issue that demands attention.

KEY FINDINGS

1 Social media is a primary source of news for young Australians

Two in five (41%) young people aged 10–17 used social media for news “yesterday”, while one in three (32%) actively follow social media accounts to get news.

2 The ban has had limited reach so far

Three in five (61%) under-16s report no meaningful change in social media access, while one in four (26%) have been significantly affected.

3 When the ban does work, news access plummets

One in two (51%) of those significantly impacted by the ban say they are now getting less news.

4 News diets are already limited

Two in five (39%) young people don't use any formal news sources beyond what they get access to indirectly on social media.

5 The impact of reduced news access is not evenly distributed

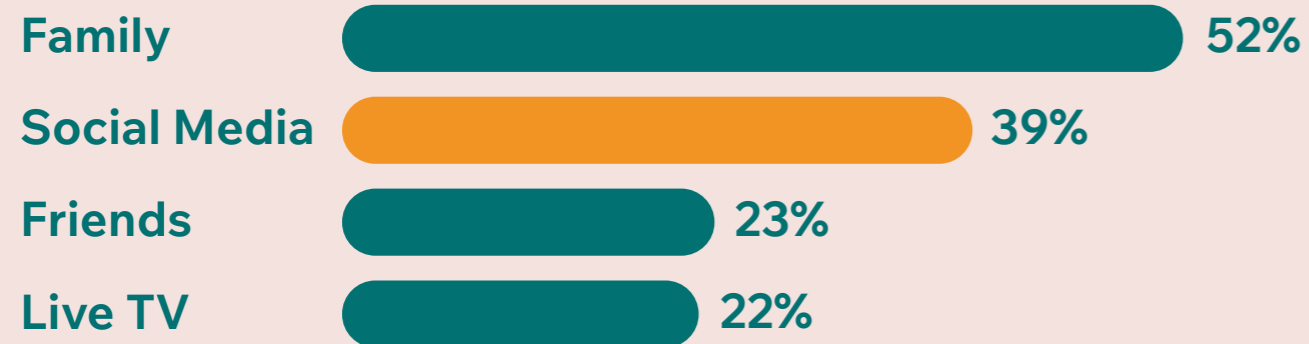
The ban's impact falls hardest on young people whose news diets are the most restricted.

6 If enforcement improves, the consequences will grow

As the ban affects more young people, as intended, young people's news engagement will decline further.

Social media is how young Australians find news

PREFERRED SOURCES OF NEWS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE:⁴



Social media is one of the most popular and preferred methods for young people to get news – far more popular than television, websites, apps, radio and podcasts.

News on social media is not just about passive exposure. Young people are active news-seekers on social media, with around one third (32%) following accounts specifically for news. This means the ban isn't just disrupting social media use. It's also disrupting established news-seeking behaviours.



Social media isn't just where young people happen to find news: it's where they go looking for it. Our data suggests that, for many young people, blocking their social media access doesn't redirect their news engagement – it ends it.

41% young people who reported using social media for news the previous day.¹

72% 16-17 year olds who use social media to get news — this increases with age starting at 37% for 10-12 year olds.²

32% young people who follow accounts specifically for news – intentional, not incidental, news-seeking.³

1. "Which of the below activities did you do yesterday?" 13 options. Base N = 1,027.

2. "How often do you do each of the following?" Proportion selecting "Often" or "Sometimes". Base N = 1,027.

3. "How often do you follow people or accounts on social media specifically to get news?" Proportion selecting "Often" or "Sometimes". Base N = 1,027.

4. "Where do you prefer to get news stories from?" Select up to 3 from 13 options. Base N = 1,027.

The ban is currently having limited overall impact, but 1 in 4 under 16 are affected

EFFECT OF BAN ON YOUNG PEOPLE

26%
significantly affected

Substantial reduction or complete
stoppage across platforms

51%
report less news

12%
moderately affected

Some reduction in use across
one or more platforms

34%
report less news

61%
not affected

No change or increased
social media use

22%
report less news

The ban's limited current reach is not the end of the story. If enforcement improves – as intended – young people's news consumption and engagement will decline even further.

To understand how young people's social media use has changed following the ban, we measured the degree to which their use of each platform changed. This ranged from partial disruption to complete stoppage.

The results are clear: most young people aged 10-15 have not changed their social media use. However, a significant minority have been affected.

The more young people are impacted by the ban, the more likely they are to report that they are getting less news: 1 in 3 (34%) young people moderately affected by the ban report they now get less news. This jumps to 1 in 2 (51%) for those significantly affected. In addition, some young people not directly impacted by the ban also report getting less news: this is likely a result of their changed social media experience due to their friends leaving platforms or using them less.

1. Ban Impact Score; see methodology appendix. Base N = 607 (10-15 year olds who used at least one age-restricted platform before the ban came into effect).

We asked: "Since the social media ban was introduced on December 10 2025, do you now have less or more of the following?" Percentages calculated using proportion of responses "Much less" or "A little less" for either "Access to information about world news and events" or "Access to information about local news and events in my community".

When the ban is effective, the consequences for news access are profound

For those most affected, this isn't just a shift in news habits – they say they are now getting less news.

51% of those significantly affected by the ban report getting less news

YOUNG PEOPLE SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACTED BY THE BAN REPORT LESS:

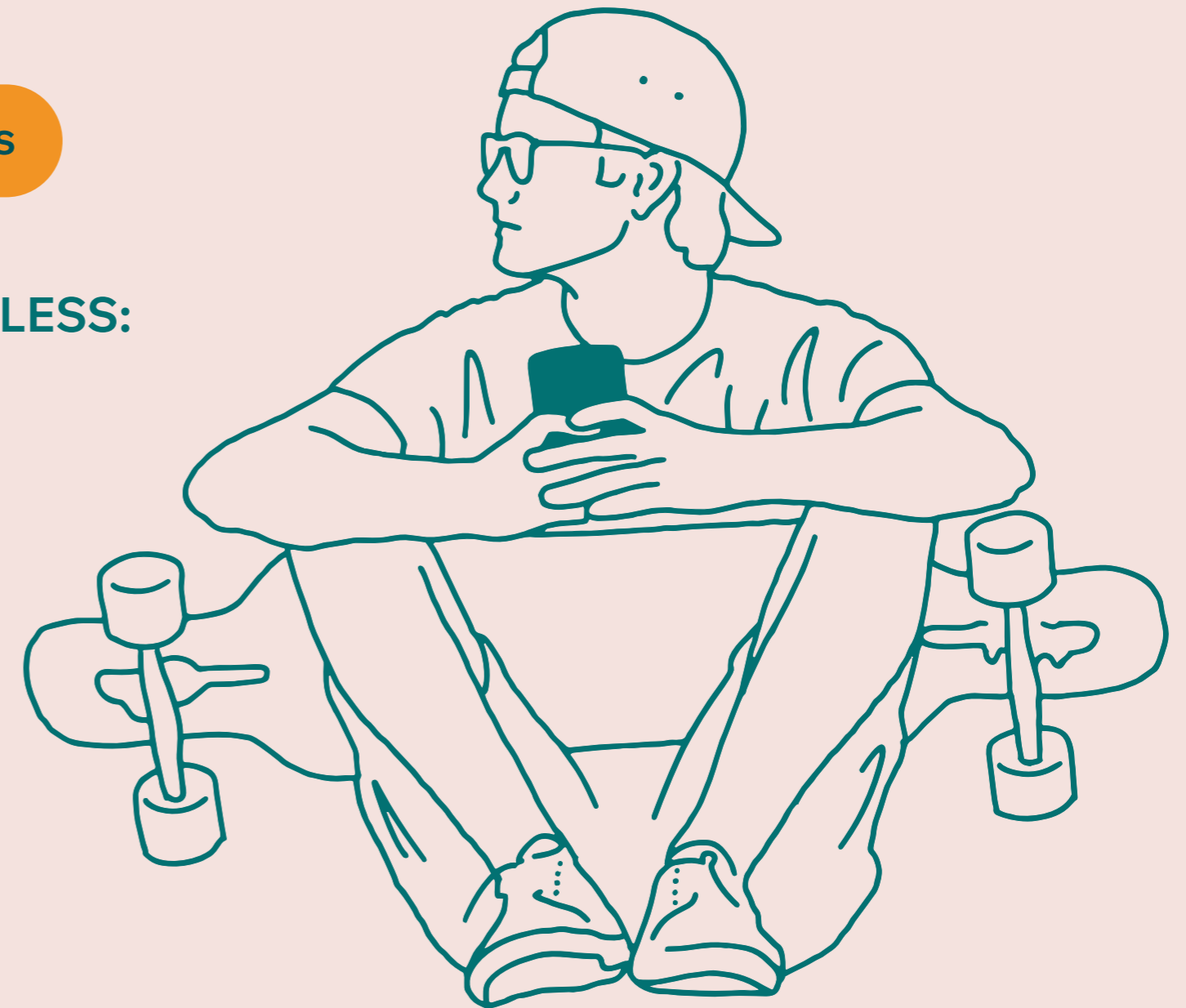
Access to world news and events 47%

Opportunity to share views or take action 45%

Access to local news and community events 42%

Access to news about issues they care about 41%

Discussions about news with others 40%



1. "Since the ban was introduced on December 10 2025, do you now have less or more of the following?" Proportion selecting "Much less" or "A little less".
Base N = 160 (10-15 year olds significantly affected by the ban).

Young people's news diets are already limited

The impact of losing social media as a news source is compounded by the fact that young people's news diets are already limited.

Young people struggle to find traditional news sources relevant, and most don't believe traditional journalism understands and reflects their concerns and experiences. This means that there are significant barriers to news engagement for young people, and alternatives to replace social media access are limited.



For many young Australians, the barriers to using traditional news media are just too high. This means that when social media access is removed, many are left without any formal source of news.

FORMAL NEWS SOURCES

39% don't use any formal news source

19% use just one source¹

BARRIERS TO TRADITIONAL NEWS

75% say news organisations have no idea what their lives are actually like

71% find it difficult to source news relevant to people their age.²

1. "How often do you do each of the following?" 13 options. Proportion responding "Often" or "Sometimes". See methodology appendix for items categorised as formal and informal/indirect. Base N = 1,027.

2. "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" Proportion responding "Strongly agree" or "Agree". Base N = 1,027.

Those with the most restricted news diets are impacted the most

News access isn't reduced uniformly among young people. The ban's impact on news engagement falls hardest on those with the fewest alternatives.

The impact of reduced social media access is not evenly distributed: it falls hardest on young people whose news diets are the most limited. Young people without university-educated parents rely on a narrower set of formal news sources. This group has fewer alternatives when a main source is removed.

FORMAL NEWS SOURCES BY PARENTAL EDUCATION¹

Average number of formal news sources used often or sometimes:²



1. "What is the highest level of educational attainment achieved by any of the parents/guardians in your household?" High = university qualification; Low = Completed secondary school or lower. Base N = 1,027.

2. "How often do you do each of the following?" 13 options. See methodology appendix for items categorised as formal and informal/indirect. Base N = 1,027.

News engagement provides the foundation for civic participation

A substantial body of research has established a clear link between news consumption, media literacy and civic participation. Given the critical role news engagement plays in civic participation, the goal should be to increase young people's engagement.



If we want young Australians to grow into informed, engaged citizens, we can't accept their reduced access to news as a mere side effect of online safety policy.

THE EVIDENCE

Engagement and knowledge:

Young people say getting news makes them feel knowledgeable and able to act on issues that matter to them.¹

News and civic participation:

Regular news consumption is consistently associated with higher rates of civic participation, political engagement and community involvement.²

News and media literacy:

Young people who engage more with news show stronger abilities to evaluate sources and identify misinformation – skills built best through practice, not taught in isolation.¹

1. Notley, T., Chambers, S., Zhong, H. F., Park, S., Lee, J., & Dezuanni, M. (2023). *News and young Australians in 2023: How children and teens access, perceive and are affected by news media*. Research Report. Western Sydney University. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2023-10/apo-nid324686.pdf>

2. Boulianne S. & Theocharis Y. (2020). *Young people, digital media, and engagement: A meta-analysis of research*. *Soc Sci Comput Rev*, 38(2), 111–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439318814190>

The social media ban's impact on young people's news access warrants a policy response

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT THE BAN, BY AGE GROUP

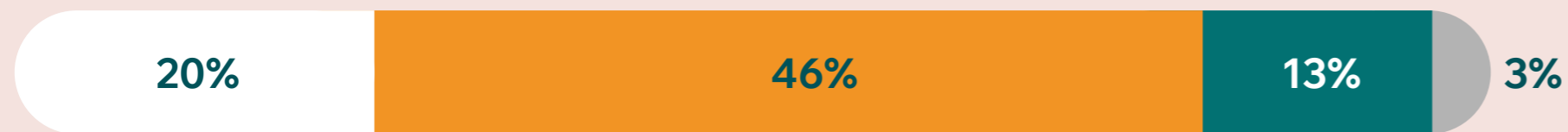
Ages 10-12



Ages 13-15



Ages 16-17



Support Mixed feelings Against Don't care/unsure

“Mixed feelings” is the most common response across all age groups – although those aged 13–15 are more opposed than other groups.

Whatever one's view of the ban, its adverse impact on news engagement should be part of policy deliberations and public discussions. To address the fall in news engagement, policymakers can introduce initiatives that proactively support young people's engagement with high-quality, trustworthy news sources.

The debate around the social media ban has focused almost entirely on mental health and online safety. The consequences for young people's news access have been largely absent from the conversation.

Further, most surveys about the ban have only asked people if they are “for” or “against” it. Our study shows the most common response from young people is “mixed feelings”.

This suggests that many young people perceive both advantages and disadvantages with the ban.

About the survey

SAMPLE: Nationally representative online survey of 1,027 young Australians aged 10–17.

FIELDWORK: Conducted February 2026.

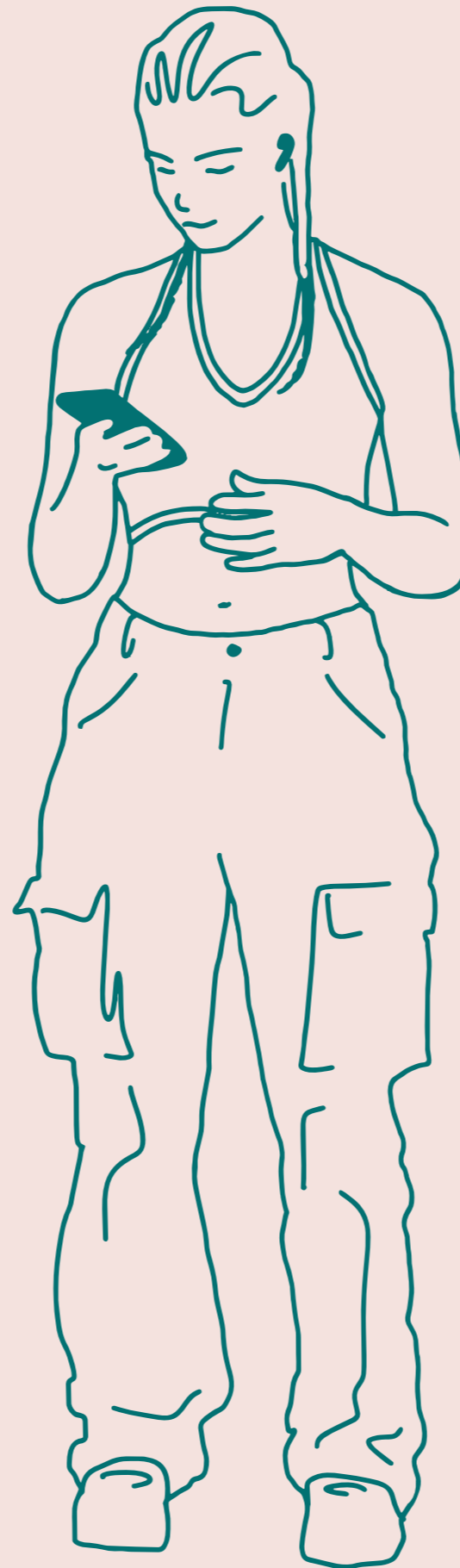
STUDY CONTEXT: The fourth in a series investigating young people and news in Australia, led by Professor Tanya Notley at Western Sydney University. A full report on the 2026 survey will be released in the second half of 2026.

BAN IMPACT SCORE (BIS): For each respondent aged under 16, change in use of each age-restricted platform was scored: stopped completely (2), using less (1), no change (0). Scores were averaged across all platforms the respondent used in the six months prior to the survey (to August 2025). A higher score indicated greater disruption. Respondents were classified as not affected (BIS = 0), moderately affected ($0 < \text{BIS} \leq 0.8$) or significantly affected ($\text{BIS} > 0.8$).

EXEMPT PLATFORMS: Discord, Messenger, WhatsApp, YouTube Kids, Roblox and other platforms not age-restricted by the eSafety Commissioner were excluded from ban impact calculations.

INFORMAL/INDIRECT NEWS SOURCES: Family, friends, teachers, social media, AI tools and news summaries.

FORMAL NEWS SOURCES: Print newspapers; news stories on news websites, apps, radio, podcast, live TV or on-demand TV.



Research team

Prof. Tanya Notley · Dr Simon Chambers – Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY



Institute for Culture and Society

Prof. Michael Dezuanni – Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology



Digital Media Research Centre

Prof. Sora Park · Dr Jee Young Lee – News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra



UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

NEWS AND MEDIA RESEARCH CENTRE

Young People and News Survey 2026: The impact of the social media ban on young people's news engagement. For enquiries contact [Tanya Notley](#), Western Sydney University.

Illustration and Design by [katedelalune.com](#).