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Media Consumption and Content Preferences of Diverse Australian Audiences Report

Exploring the Media Consumption and Content Preferences of Diverse Australian Audiences

A Survey Report with a Focus on Asian Australian Viewers | 2025-2026

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Date of Publication: 16 June 2026

Suggested Citation:

Wang, Y., Khorana, S., & Khoo, O. (2026). *Exploring the media consumption and content preferences of diverse Australian audiences: A survey report with a focus on Asian Australian viewers, 2025–2026*. UNSW Sydney and Monash University.

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Executive Summary

This report provides an indicative snapshot of the screen media consumption practices, content preferences and diversity-related audience perceptions of Australian adults, with a particular focus on Asian Australian and CALD viewers. It addresses a key evidence gap: while Australian screen industry debates have increasingly focused on diversity, equity and inclusion, there remains limited updated audience data on how multicultural viewers actually access, interpret and evaluate screen content in a digital, multilingual and transnational media environment.

Our survey shows that the sample is young, urban, culturally diverse and strongly shaped by migration and multilingual household life. Respondents do not fit a simple model of either ‘mainstream Australian audience’ or ‘ethnic media audience’. Instead, they move across English and non-English content, Australian and overseas productions, public broadcasters, global streaming platforms, social video and community-specific media. This hybridity is one of the strongest findings of the report and should be treated as a central contribution.

Three more patterns stand out. First, content consumption is global and multifaceted. News and current affairs, Australian-produced or Australian-broadcast programs, non-English or overseas ethnic content, and short-form online video all appear prominently in open-ended responses. Second, ABC and SBS remain important institutions for CALD and Asian Australian audiences, even when they are not mainly consumed through linear broadcast television. Third, respondents welcome diverse representation, but they do not accept diversity branding uncritically. They worry about tokenism, assess cultural authenticity carefully, and judge Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) success through the quality of what appears on screen. For respondents, authenticity is not just a question of whether creators come from the represented community. Cultural customs and details, historical accuracy, realistic character behaviour and credible language use are all important. Audiences value cultural insiders in production, but they ultimately judge authenticity through the finished text: whether the story feels culturally, socially and emotionally believable.

The findings have clear implications for screen producers, broadcasters, platforms and policy actors. CALD audiences are already engaged, digitally active and culturally knowledgeable. To reach them, Australian screen institutions need to provide diverse stories across the platforms audiences actually use; treat multilingual and transnational viewing as mainstream rather than marginal; and move beyond celebratory multiculturalism towards deeper accounts of migration, intergenerational relationships, hybrid identities, cultural difference and belonging.

Key Findings

1. Multilingual households are a defining feature of the sample. Respondents and their families typically move between English and one or more home languages. English remains important in media consumption, but many participants also use heritage languages or bilingual mixes in everyday communication and viewing. This is a significant finding because it shows that language choice is not a niche issue; it is central to how CALD audiences navigate screen cultures.



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3. Screen consumption is global, multifaceted and multi-platform. Open-ended responses show that audiences watch news/current affairs, Australian-broadcast content, non-English or overseas ethnic content, and short-form online video. This pattern is important because there is not a simple preference for “ethnic media” or “mainstream media”. The results show a hybrid viewing culture that combines local, global and culturally specific sources.

4. Public broadcasters remain important, but access is shifting. ABC and SBS are visible in responses and remain important institutions for CALD communities, especially for news, multilingual content and culturally diverse programming. However, audiences often access content through catch-up services, streaming, and clips on social media rather than through analog or linear television.

5. Diverse audiences want more nuanced stories. Respondents expressed interest in Asian Australian migrant experiences, culturally hybrid identities, intergenerational migrant family conflict, multilingual programming, First Nations stories, LGBTQ+ content, disability narratives and diverse religious perspectives. They are asking not only for more visibility but for fuller and more specific stories.

6. Diversity branding does not automatically produce trust. Only a small group said diversity labels made them trust content more. The largest group reported no particular reaction, while many worried about tokenism or said they would verify authenticity. Diversity labels therefore act less as a guarantee and more as a prompt for critical assessment.

7. Authenticity is judged through the finished screen text. Respondents prioritise accurate cultural customs and details, historical accuracy and realistic character behaviour. Cultural background of creators matters, but it is not enough by itself. For audiences, DEI works when it produces credible language, cultural texture, historical context and characterisation.

Report Snapshot: At a Glance

A one-page overview of the core survey signals

183	80%+	74%
valid responses	under 35	female
online survey, 2025-2026	sample skews young	gender distribution
84%	98%	East Asian
NSW	major city / suburban	largest heritage group
urban sample concentration	limited regional data	Asian Australian focus



Netflix + YouTube	34%	83%
top platforms	worry about tokenism	learn festivals/customs
digital-first viewing	diversity labels are scrutinised	screen media as intercultural learning

Reading the Data

A short note on methodology: survey design, recruitment and sample profile.

Survey design: The report is based on an online Qualtrics survey examining screen media consumption, content preferences and attitudes toward diverse representation among Australian adults, with a focus on multicultural and Asian Australian audiences.

Recruitment: The survey was circulated through university networks, workshops, conferences, social media and community groups. Data was collected between June and September 2025, with an additional round in March-April 2026. To be eligible for participation, respondents had to be 18 years or older, currently residing in Australia, and willing to complete the survey.

Sample: 184 questionnaires were received, and 183 were valid. The sample is concentrated in NSW, major cities, younger adults, women and people with migrant or Asian Australian backgrounds.

Limitations: Findings are indicative rather than statistically representative of the Australian population. Multiple-response items do not sum to 100%. Open-ended responses were coded into broad categories and should be read as exploratory signals rather than precise prevalence measures.

Introduction

This project seeks to understand the screen media consumption and engagement practices of Australia’s multicultural audiences, with a particular focus on Asian Australian communities. In recent years, Australian media organisations have taken significant steps towards improving Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) through commissioning guidelines, internal policies and targeted programs (see Edmond and Khoo 2026). These initiatives have gained momentum over the past 5–10 years as media sectors respond to a growing mandate to diversify their content, workforce and audience reach.

Despite this increased momentum, we do not have updated empirical data on how Australia’s multicultural audiences engage with their screen content: how they access, consume and discover this content, what it means to individuals and their communities, and how this varies across demographic groups. This survey was undertaken as part of a larger research project that aims to advance our understanding of the largest non-Anglo Celtic diasporic communities in Australia, examining audience preferences and engagement at the intersection of technological change and ethnic identity. Existing studies have either considered the impact of technology on Australian audiences generally or focused on ethnic communities without providing updated data accounting for the rise of Internet-distributed content. Our project seeks to engage Australian audiences and ensure that diverse stories are connecting with audiences at home and abroad. Access to culturally relevant screen programming and information supports people from diverse backgrounds to participate fully in social and civic life and contributes to building stronger, more inclusive communities. The results from this survey provide preliminary evidence-based guidance for future screen and cultural policy development in Australia. This is particularly significant given that the Australian screen industry contributes an estimated \$6.2 billion to GDP, making it the largest creative contributor to the national economy (ABS, 2021-2022).

Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative responses, this report analyses the survey findings in relation to four research questions:

Key Question 1: Who are Australia’s screen audiences?

Key Question 2: What are audiences watching?



Key Question 3: How and where are audiences accessing screen content?

Key Question 4: Are diversity and inclusion initiatives reaching CALD audiences?

By answering these questions, the report generates crucial insights into what Australian audiences want to see, and on which platforms they seek out content. It also examines how current regulations, initiatives and policies designed to improve diversity within the Australian screen industries are being translated into audience experiences. The broader research program aims to ensure that participants’ contributions will assist in informing future screen content and policy development, supporting a pipeline of programming that better reflects and represents them. For the broader community, the information generated by this project supports all citizens—regardless of ethnic or gender identity, sexuality or disability—to engage more fully with Australian media and cultural life.

KQ1. Who are Australia’s screen audiences? (Audience Demographics)

KQ1 summary

The surveyed audience is young, urban, and culturally diverse. The most important finding is not just demographic diversity, but the everyday multilingual and bicultural media environment in which respondents live.

Age and Gender:

The survey sample is strongly shaped by age, location, migration and cultural background. More than 80% of respondents were aged under 35, with the largest group aged 18-24. This young age profile should be interpreted partly in relation to the recruitment channels used, including university-linked and digitally networked pathways. It is also relevant to later findings because younger respondents are more likely to access screen content through streaming services, social video platforms and algorithmic recommendations.

Women comprised a large share of the sample, with about two-thirds identifying as female, around one-third as male and a small remainder identifying as non-binary or unspecified.

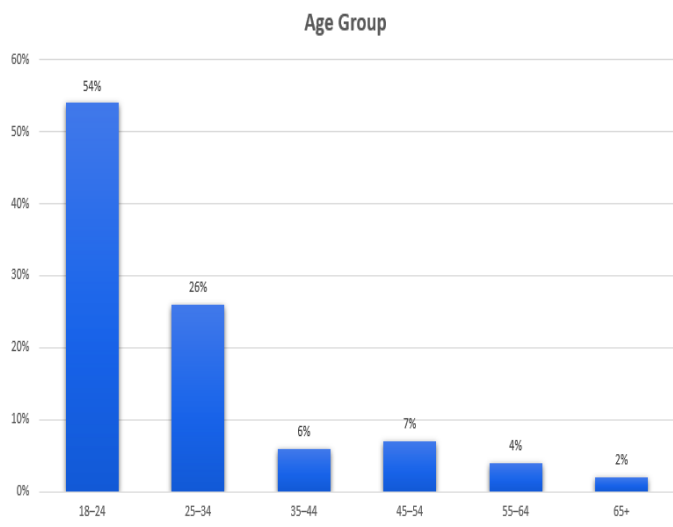


Figure 1. Age group distribution of respondents

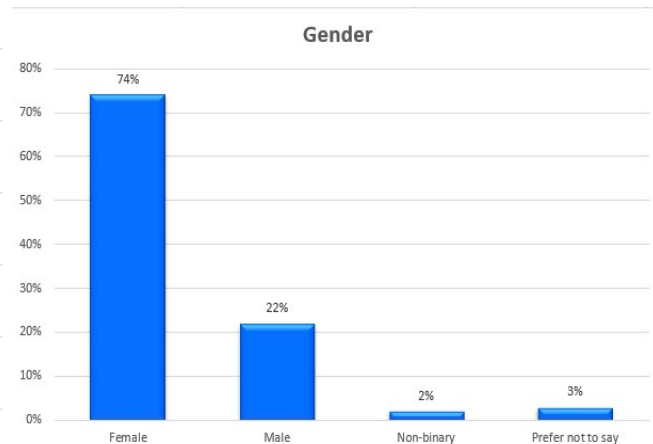


Figure 2. Gender distribution of respondents

Location:

Geographically, most respondents resided in urban areas, especially New South Wales (Sydney and surrounds). In fact, nearly all respondents (98%) were from major cities (city or suburban areas), with negligible representation from regional or rural Australia. This urban concentration mirrors Australia’s overall population distribution – roughly 89% of Australians live in urban areas (ABS, 2025) – and the tendency of migrant communities to settle in capital cities for work, family, and community support.



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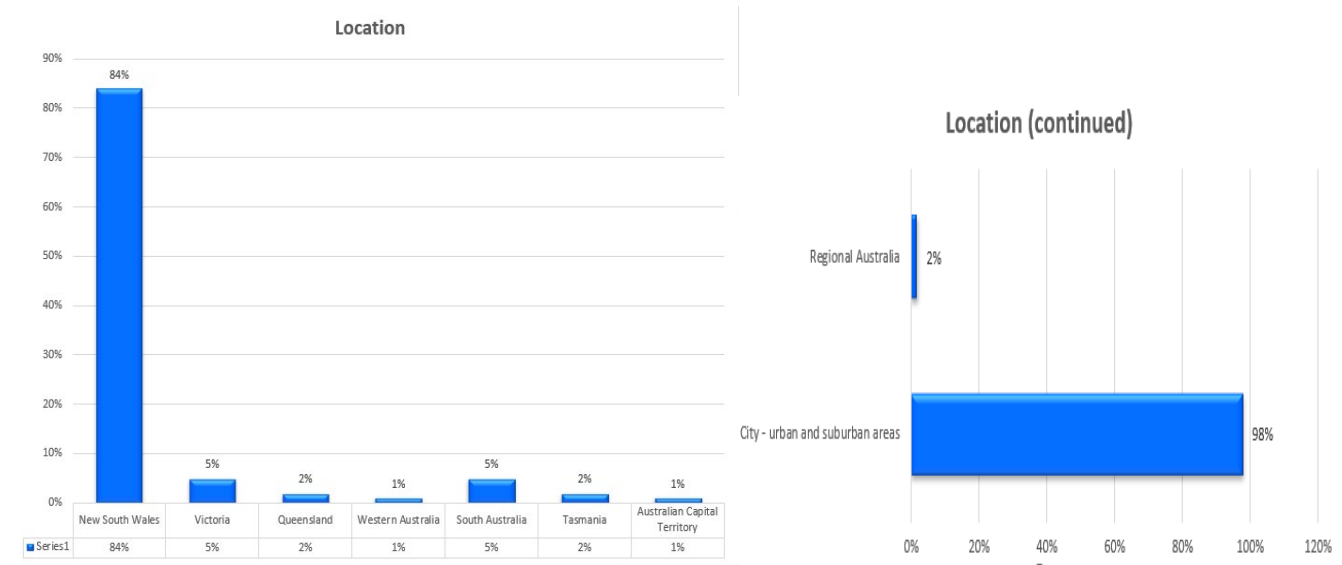


Figure 3. Location of respondents: state/territory and urban/regional distribution

Migration status:

Migration background is central to the sample. The survey includes a meaningful proportion of first-generation, 1.5-generation, second-generation and later-generation respondents. Because the migration item allowed multiple responses, the percentages should not be read as mutually exclusive. Overall, the data confirm that the sample is strongly connected to migration, either through respondents' own mobility or through family histories. This makes the findings especially relevant to CALD audiences whose everyday media practices are shaped by transnational life, family ties across borders and cultural negotiation.

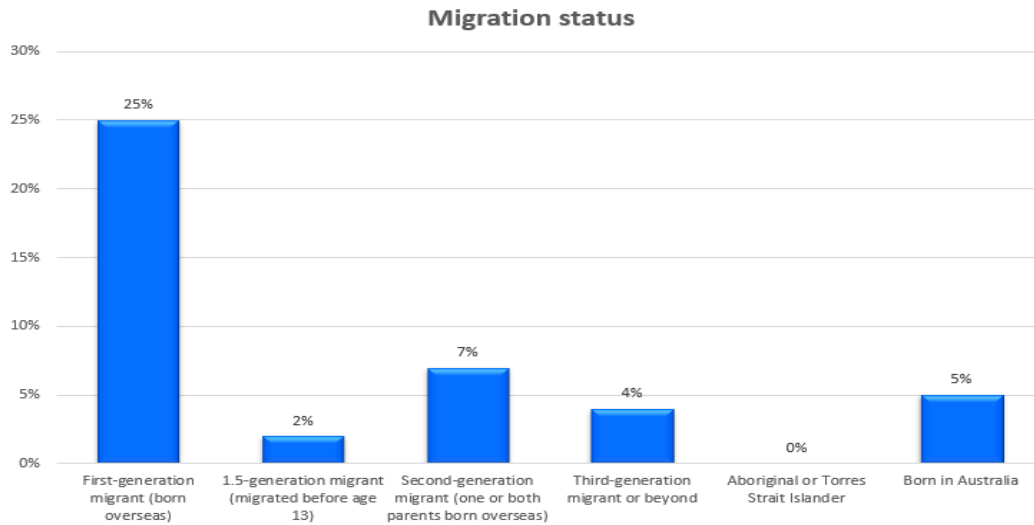


Figure 4. Migration status of respondents

Cultural/ethnic heritage:

Cultural and ethnic heritage further confirms the Asian Australian and CALD focus of the report. A plurality of respondents hailed from Asian Australian backgrounds while still including a mix of other backgrounds. East Asian heritage was most common, selected by 56% of respondents (e.g. Chinese ancestry, comprising roughly 23% of respondents), followed by South Asian (18%), and Southeast Asian (16%) backgrounds. Smaller numbers reported European (7%), Latin American (1%) heritage, and a modest number (14%) identified simply as "Australian" (likely implying Anglo-Australian background) or "mixed/other." This reflects the survey's deliberate focus on Asian Australian communities, a significant subset of Australia's multicultural population. According to recent census data, 31.5% of Australia's



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population was born overseas, and 22.8% of Australians speak a language other than English at home – underscoring that CALD audiences (especially of Asian descent) form a major part of contemporary Australian society.

Cultural/ethnic heritage

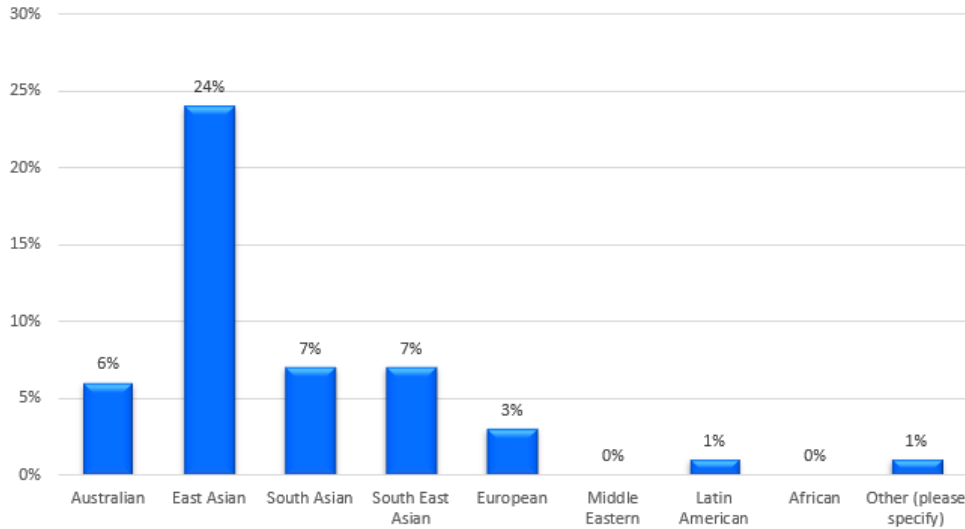


Figure 5. Cultural/ethnic heritage of respondents

Language use - daily communication and media use:

The most analytically important demographic finding is multilingual media life. Many respondents reported using non-English languages in daily communication and media consumption. For instance, a considerable share said their family communicates mostly or entirely in a language other than English at home, and a similarly large group described consuming media in languages other than English (or in bilingual mix). Only a small fraction (around 10–15%) use exclusively English media, suggesting most engage with some content in their heritage languages. This dovetails with national patterns: over one-fifth of Australians speak a language other than English at home, and among CALD youth, more than 80% use digital platforms to stay in touch with friends and family (AIHW, 2025) – often switching between languages and cultures online. The prevalence of bilingual and multilingual media use in our sample indicates that CALD audiences maintain strong linguistic ties to their heritage, even as they navigate English-dominant media. This aligns with marketing research showing 88% of the CALD community wants to connect or stay connected with their cultural roots (David, 2024). Speaking their mother tongues at home and consuming content from their culture are key ways they preserve that connection. Taken together, these results suggest that families in the sample typically move between English and one or more home languages, rather than using a single language consistently. This confirms that the survey is capturing genuinely multilingual, migrant-background households. The data also imply that audiences are likely using a mix of English-language and home-language content across different services (e.g. streaming platforms and ethnic media), but English is still more dominant at the point of media consumption than in everyday family talk—an important nuance for understanding how CALD audiences navigate both Australian and transnational screen cultures.



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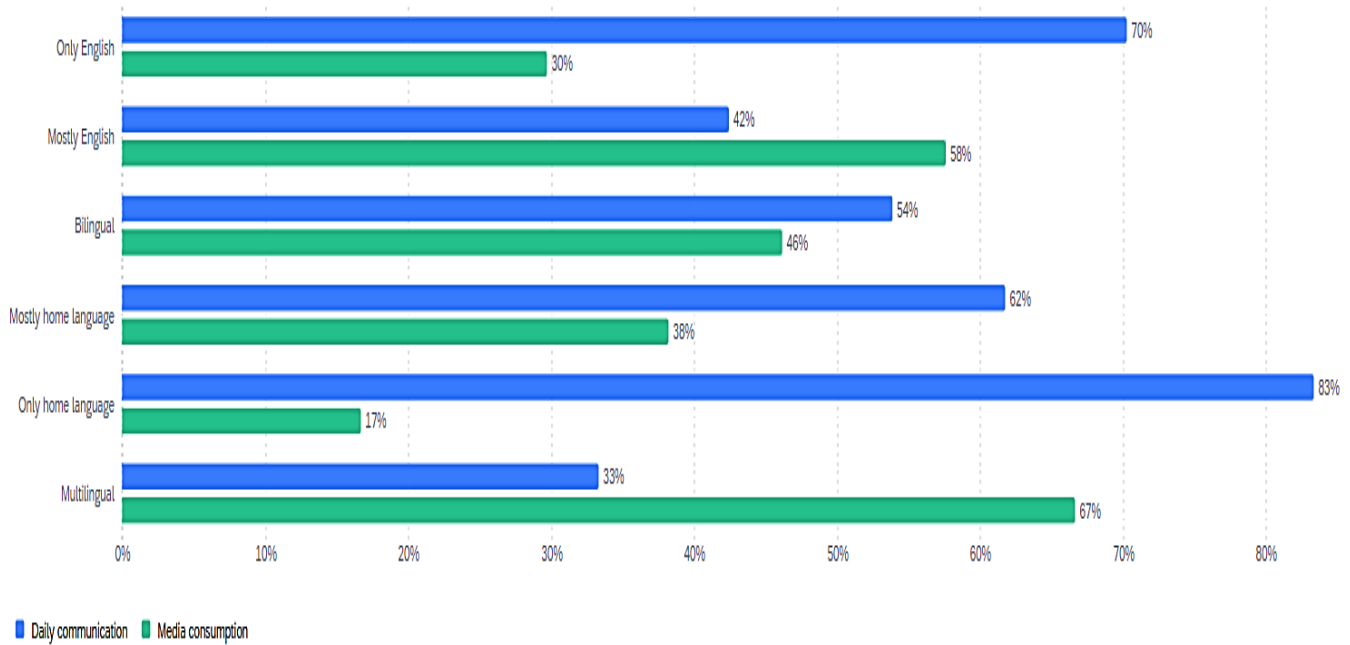


Figure 6. Language use in daily communication and media consumption.

This multilingual pattern matters for industry and policy. It suggests that audiences may use different languages for different media needs: English for mainstream Australian content or global streaming, home languages for family communication, overseas news, diaspora entertainment, comedy, religious material or culturally specific commentary. The same respondent may therefore belong simultaneously to Australian, transnational and platform-based media publics. This finding should be highlighted because it explains why simple audience categories such as ‘Australian viewers’, ‘Asian viewers’ or ‘ethnic media users’ are inadequate.

Highlighted finding: multilingual audiences

Overall, KQ1 reveals that Australia’s screen audiences – especially within Asian Australian CALD groups – are young, urban, and multicultural. They straddle cultures, often speaking multiple languages and identifying with both Australian and ancestral heritages. However, despite their significant presence, these diverse audiences have historically been under-recognised by mainstream media. Nearly half of Australians have at least one parent born overseas, yet media professionals (like TV presenters) remain overwhelmingly Anglophone Anglo-Celtic - over 78% Anglo background among presenters (Herald, 2025a). This demographic gap between audiences and media gatekeepers highlights why studying CALD audience habits and needs is important. The subsequent sections address what this diverse audience is watching, how they access content, and how effectively industry diversity initiatives are reaching them.

KQ2. What are audiences watching? (Content Choices and Preferences)

KQ2 summary

Respondents’ screen consumption is global, hybrid and multifaceted. They watch Australian public broadcasters, international streaming titles, non-English or overseas ethnic content, news/current affairs and short-form online video. This is one of the report’s most important and original findings.



Content types of “most-watched programs”

Open-ended responses to the question about most-watched programs show a highly diverse viewing culture. Respondents listed English-language global hits, Australian programs, Asian dramas, Bollywood films, international and Australian news, documentaries, reality television, podcasts and short online videos. The range of examples matters because it shows that CALD audiences are not simply substituting ‘ethnic’ content for ‘mainstream’ content. They are assembling personalised viewing repertoires across several content worlds.

Table 1. Content types mentioned in the “most-watched programs” question.

Content type/theme	%	Examples from responses
News and current affairs	40%	ABC News, SBS News, Sky News, Al Jazeera, Insiders, 4 Corners, BBC
Australian-produced or Australian-broadcast shows	40%	Alone Australia, MasterChef Australia, The Newsreader, Strife, ABC iView dramas
Non-English or overseas ethnic content	28%	Chinese TV series, Panchayat, Bollywood classics, Lychees in Chang’an, Spanish drama
Short-form online video or podcasts	28%	TikTok, Instagram reels, YouTube channels, Facebook videos, Rotten Mango

Although the question was qualitative and not designed for precise frequency counts, some clear patterns emerge: (a) News and current affairs are central. Around 31% of respondents mentioned at least one news or current affairs program (e.g. ABC News, SBS News, Sky News, Al Jazeera, Insiders, 4 Corners, BBC). This reinforces earlier findings that a significant portion of the sample uses screen media to stay informed, not only to be entertained, (b) Australian-produced content. Australian public broadcasters are highly visible. Similarly, 29% of responses referenced Australian-made or Australian-broadcast content, including ABC News, SBS News, Alone Australia, MasterChef Australia, Strife, The Newsreader and programs on ABC iView and SBS. **This suggests that ABC and SBS remain important institutions for CALD and Asian Australian audiences**, echoing the literature on SBS’s role in serving multilingual communities, and (c) Non-English and overseas content is common. About 16% of responses explicitly mentioned non-English or culturally specific programs, such as Chinese TV series (five hahaha), Lychees in Chang’an (Chinese), Panchayat (Hindi), Bollywood classics, Korean TV shows “you’re my destiny/squid game”, The Lady’s Companion (Spanish), Bhool Chuk Maf, along with Indian news websites and Singaporean and Indonesian YouTube channels. This supports the broader survey pattern that **many respondents maintain transnational media connections, consuming content from Asia and beyond**. Notably, content from their cultures of origin (such as Chinese, Indian, or Korean TV shows), includes: e.g. Schitt’s Creek, Ginny & Georgia, Stranger Things, Squid Game, True Beauty, South Park, Family Guy, Severance, Gilmore Girls, The Crown, The Sopranos, Ghosts (US), Emily in Paris, often accessed via online overseas platforms. This indicates that **CALD audiences actively seek out content that reflects their heritage or languages, alongside popular English-language content**. This also aligns with diaspora media research that finds migrant communities engage with both homeland media and local media to fulfill different needs. As well as (d) Short-form online video is part of the everyday media diet. Another 8% of responses referenced TikTok, YouTube, Instagram reels or Facebook videos (e.g. “short videos on TikTok”, “YouTube videos from India”, “Instagram reels”, “Viva La Dirt League on Facebook”). Together with a mention of the “Rotten Mango” podcast, this indicates that screen engagement is not limited to long-form TV or film, but includes short, algorithmically curated content.



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Figure 7. Word cloud of most-watched programs mentioned by respondents

This content mix is important for two reasons. First, it confirms that Australian public broadcasters remain visible and valued among CALD audiences. ABC and SBS appear in open-ended responses even though later platform data shows relatively low use of traditional linear television. Their institutional role therefore persists, but the mode of access is changing. Second, the presence of overseas and non-English content indicates ongoing transnational media connection. Respondents use screen media to remain connected to heritage languages, cultural references, homeland politics, regional entertainment industries and diaspora communities.

The platform references embedded in the open responses also speak directly to KQ3. Public broadcasters, free-to-air and catch-up services were mentioned alongside social media and video platforms, overseas or ethnic television and news sites, cinema or live events, and subscription video-on-demand services. This again shows that content preference and platform access cannot be separated. A program may be Australian in origin but viewed through an app; a news item may be international but reached through Facebook; an ethnic program may be accessed through YouTube rather than a dedicated ethnic broadcaster.

Table 2. Platforms and services referenced in open-ended responses

Platform/service category referenced in open responses	%	Examples
Public broadcasters, free-to-air and catch-up	31%	ABC News, SBS News, ABC iView, BBC iPlayer, Al Jazeera
Social media and video platforms	29%	TikTok, YouTube, Facebook video, Instagram reels
Overseas or ethnic TV/news sites	16%	Indian news websites and channels, 8worldSG, YouTube news from India
Cinema, theatre and live events	12%	Materialists, Tony Awards, Hamilton
Subscription VOD explicitly named	8%	Netflix, Disney+; many other titles were likely streamed but platforms were not always named

Open-ended viewing preferences were coded into four broad categories and cross-tabulated with age, gender, location, migration background and cultural background. As the data is exploratory, the results should be interpreted as indicative rather than statistically representative. Overall, respondents' viewing practices were shaped most clearly by age, migration background and cultural positioning. Older respondents were more likely to mention news/current affairs and Australian-produced content, while younger respondents, especially those aged 25–34, showed stronger engagement with short-form online media. First- and 1.5-generation migrants were more likely to combine Australian-produced content with non-English or overseas ethnic media, suggesting a dual local–transnational orientation. In contrast, later-generation or Australian-born respondents were more associated with platform-based short-form content. Cultural background also mattered: East Asian respondents showed a balanced media profile, while South and Southeast Asian



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respondents more often combined news/current affairs with ethnic or overseas media. These findings suggest that **respondents’ screen cultures are hybrid, multilingual and multi-platform, rather than shaped by a single national or ethnic media orientation.**

Frequency of culturally diverse content:

The survey also asked how often respondents watch certain types of content, including “non-English language content”, stories with “mixed cultural identities”, narratives about “cultural conflict”, and productions with “multicultural casts”. A significant number of participants reported watching such content “often” or “frequently”. For instance, virtually all respondents had watched at least some non-English language content; many did so regularly (in our data, the majority rated their frequency as 3–5 on a 1–5 scale for non-English content, with very few saying “never”). Likewise, content featuring multicultural characters or cross-cultural themes was commonly part of their media diet (the plurality of respondents watched these sometimes or often). This demonstrates a robust appetite for diverse stories. It is consistent with global audience surveys that show over 80% of people worldwide value diverse representation in TV/film and want to see “lots of different groups and identities” on screen. In fact, among viewers from minority backgrounds, the demand for on-screen diversity is even higher (rising above 85%) (Global representation on-screen: Australia, 2024). Our Asian Australian respondents are no exception – they are actively watching diverse content where it exists, and likely craving more.

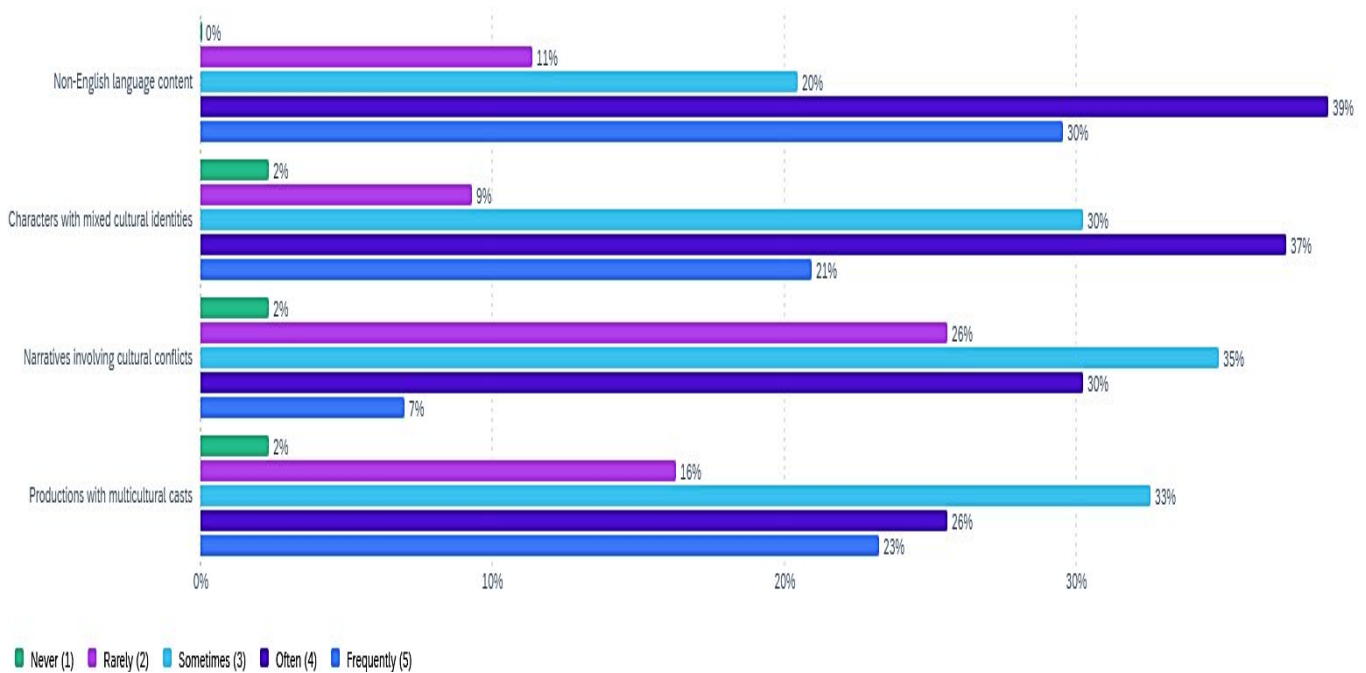


Figure 8. Frequency of culturally diverse content consumption

However, respondents also indicated that truly satisfying content is not always easy to find. Many have broadened their search to international platforms and niche content to see themselves represented. This reflects a known trend: Australian teens and young adults, especially from multicultural backgrounds, are not overly attached to locally produced content unless it resonates. A recent study of Australian teenagers found that teens “overwhelmingly preferred” global streaming content (Netflix, Disney+, etc.) over Australian free-to-air TV, and placed very low priority on a story being Australian. Several teens admitted they “don’t really want to watch shows that are about Australia” as they feel they already know that world. Instead, they gravitate to content that is novel or internationally popular (Potter et al., 2024). This attitude can be even stronger for CALD youth if Australian content has historically not reflected their cultural experiences. It’s telling that in that same study, the one Australian show that broke through to enthusiastic teen viewership was Netflix’s Heartbreak High reboot – specifically because it featured a very diverse cast and storylines (including characters of varied ethnicities, First Nations background, LGBTQ+ identities, and neurodiversity). Teens praised Heartbreak High for “actually represent[ing] how autistic people are,” including First Nations characters and not being “just all [an] all-white Australian cast,” noting “there’s a diversity” (Potter et al., 2024). This example illustrates a key point: diverse audiences will eagerly watch Australian content if it meaningfully reflects their world, but they have little interest in Australian media that doesn’t include or speak to them.



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In general, our CALD respondents appear to supplement the limited diversity in Australian mainstream media with content from abroad. Many follow international news outlets or entertainment in their mother tongue (e.g. watching Indian news online, or East Asian dramas on streaming services). This behavior aligns with diaspora media studies going back decades – for example, Asian migrant communities in Australia have long consumed imported films, satellite TV from home countries, or more recently internet content, to maintain cultural continuity as described in the classic *Floating Lives* study of Asian diasporas and media (Cunningham & Sinclair, 2001). Today’s technology makes this even easier: global streaming platforms and YouTube offer rich libraries of foreign content. A concrete result is transnational media consumption: a Chinese Australian might binge a Chinese period drama on YouTube or WeTV, an Indian Australian might stream the latest Bollywood hit or follow Indian YouTubers, etc. Marketing research confirms the motive: staying connected to culture. In fact, ethnic audiences often practice “selective exposure” – choosing ethnic-language media or culturally specific content to reinforce their identity needs (Herald, 2025a). Our survey respondents, with 88% wanting to stay linked to their roots, exemplify this selective consumption by listing many culturally-specific programs they enjoy.

At the same time, these audiences are also cosmopolitan consumers of global pop culture. They watch what everyone is watching – whether it’s Hollywood action films or the latest Korean hit drama that’s trending worldwide. The rise of K-dramas and K-pop, for example, has penetrated multicultural youth circles; one respondent mentioned *Squid Game* (the Korean series that became a global sensation) among their recent views. There is an element of pan-Asian crossover happening: Asian Australians might watch media not only from their own heritage but from other Asian cultures (e.g. Chinese Australians enjoying Korean or Japanese shows, etc.), as part of a broader Asian diaspora affinity. One PhD study found that the “Hallyu” or Korean Wave fandom among Asian Australians helped them negotiate their identity and belonging across cultures (Fluin, 2024). In essence, CALD viewers are cosmopolitan – using media as a way to explore both their own cultural narratives and those of other communities.

Preferences and gaps:

The survey also probed what types of stories audiences wish to see more often. Respondents were asked to select the top three kinds of content they felt were lacking and wanted to see more frequently. The options included First Nations Australian stories, Asian Australian migrant experiences, LGBTQ+ themed content, disability narratives, diverse religious perspectives, multilingual programming, international co-productions, intergenerational migrant family conflict stories, culturally hybrid identity stories, etc. The results showed strong interest across many of these categories – especially those reflecting cultural diversity and intersectional identities. In particular, content about Asian Australian migrant experiences was highly requested (unsurprising given many respondents are themselves Asian Australian – they want to see their lives on screen). There was also notable support for stories of culturally hybrid identities (the experience of being between cultures), and for intergenerational conflict in migrant families. These choices suggest that audiences perceive a gap in current media when it comes to nuanced migrant family stories and the realities of bicultural life. They are essentially saying: we want to see our stories told. Additionally, plenty of respondents chose other diversity categories like First Nations stories, LGBTQ+ stories, disability stories and diverse religious perspectives – indicating solidarity or multi-faceted personal identities (e.g. some Asian Australians are also LGBTQ+ or have disabilities, etc., and want those represented as well). The desire for multilingual programming was another recurrent theme – reflecting the multilingual nature of CALD audiences and a hunger for content that isn’t exclusively in English.



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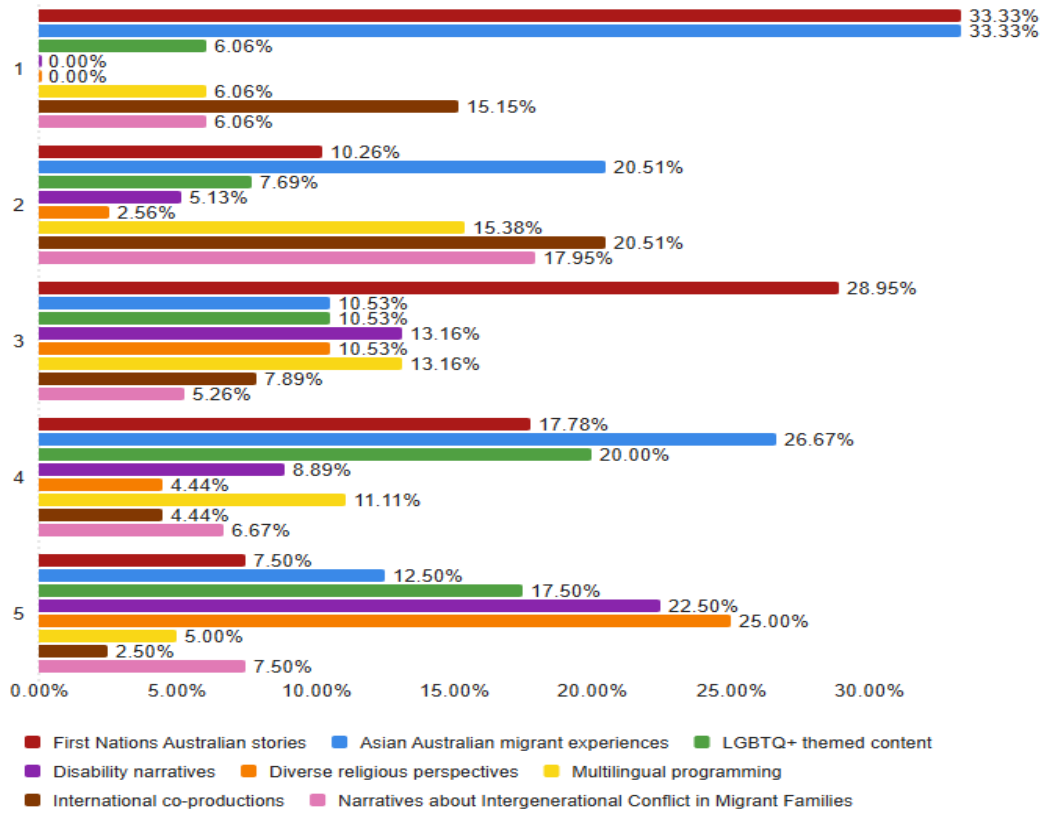


Figure 9. Top five kinds of content respondents would like to see more often

These audience desires mirror the findings of industry research on representation. Screen Australia’s comprehensive report Seeing Ourselves 2 (2023) acknowledged that while on-screen diversity in Australian TV drama has improved since 2016, many communities remain under-represented relative to their share of the population. For example, characters of non-European (i.e. non-white, excluding Indigenous) backgrounds rose to 16% of main roles in recent years (up from 7% in 2016), but this is still not fully representative of Australia’s multicultural makeup (Screen Australia report, 2023). The population with Asian, African, Middle Eastern, etc. backgrounds is significantly higher than 16%, so there is a gap. The report particularly noted critically low representation of people with disabilities, and continuing underrepresentation of certain ethnic groups (Screen Australia report, 2023). In short, progress is occurring, but “the overall pace of progress is slow and there is a long way to go to reach genuine representation of Australia’s diverse communities on screen,” as Screen Australia’s CEO Graeme Mason put it in report. Our audience’s wish list confirms that sentiment – they still aren’t seeing enough of themselves on screen. They crave content that reflects modern Australia, which, as Arts Minister Tony Burke emphasized, “shouldn’t be too much to ask” in a country as diverse as ours.

This has direct implications for the Australian screen industry: if local providers do not offer nuanced multicultural stories, audiences can and do turn to international platforms that better serve their identities, languages and interests. Respondents’ preferences and perceived gaps support this interpretation. Many wanted to see more Asian Australian migrant experiences, culturally hybrid identity stories, intergenerational migrant family conflict, multilingual programming, First Nations stories, LGBTQ+ content, disability narratives and diverse religious perspectives. These preferences show that audiences are not simply asking for diversity as surface visibility. They want stories that capture the complexity of contemporary Australia: mixed families, multilingual homes, migration histories, cross-cultural tension, sexuality, disability, religion, race, generation and belonging.

Highlighted finding: global, hybrid consumption

In short, KQ2 shows that CALD screen consumption is both culturally specific and cosmopolitan. Respondents watch media from their own communities, from Australia, from other Asian cultures and from global popular culture. They use media to stay informed, to be entertained, to maintain cultural connection, and to explore other



communities' experiences. The key industry lesson is that diverse audiences should be approached as sophisticated and mobile viewers whose loyalty depends on relevance, quality and authenticity.

This is one of the key contributions of the study: the survey captures how Asian Australian and CALD viewers combine public broadcasters, international media, ethnic content, and short-form algorithmic platforms in everyday viewing.

KQ3. How and where are audiences watching? (Platforms and Access)

KQ3 summary

Respondents primarily access content through streaming and social platforms, but this does not mean public broadcasters or ethnic media are irrelevant. The key point is that access has shifted from linear broadcasting to on-demand, algorithmic and multiplatform routes.

Preferred platforms:

The CALD audience in this survey shows a strong preference for digital and on-demand platforms over traditional broadcast television. When asked which platforms they typically use to find or view content, the most commonly used platforms were global streaming services and online video platforms, especially Netflix and YouTube. Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok were also important, particularly for short video, clips, recommendations and discovery. Traditional free-to-air television was selected by fewer respondents.

When asked "Which platforms do you typically use to find or view content?" (multiple selections allowed), the top choices were streaming services and online platforms. **The most commonly used platforms were Netflix and YouTube**, each selected by a large segment of respondents. **Close behind were social media platforms – notably Instagram, TikTok** – which many respondents use to discover short videos and clips. Facebook was also cited by some, though less dominant among younger users. In contrast, traditional free-to-air television (the public broadcast channels) was selected by relatively few respondents. Similarly, only a modest number reported using ABC iView (the national broadcaster's streaming app) or SBS On Demand regularly, and a minority used second-tier streaming services like Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, Stan or Binge. This hierarchy (global streaming and video-sharing platforms at the top; linear TV at the bottom) is consistent with broader trends among young Australians. Studies confirm that younger cohorts are "disengaged with broadcast television" and heavily oriented toward streaming and online viewing. A recent participatory audience study found Australian teens overwhelmingly prefer Netflix, Disney+, YouTube and the like over any free-to-air TV content – exactly what we see in our CALD young adult sample (Potter et al., 2024). Even among the general Australian population, as of 2020, 77% of households had at least one streaming subscription and 60% of adults had watched something on a subscription service in the past week (matching the 61% who had watched free-to-air – meaning streaming has caught up to TV in reach) (The Digital Lives of Younger Australians, 2021). Netflix was by far the most popular streaming service nationally (around 65% usage), with others like Stan and Disney+ far behind. Our sample reflects these national patterns, albeit with an even stronger tilt to online media (owing to their youth and multicultural orientation).

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Preferred platforms

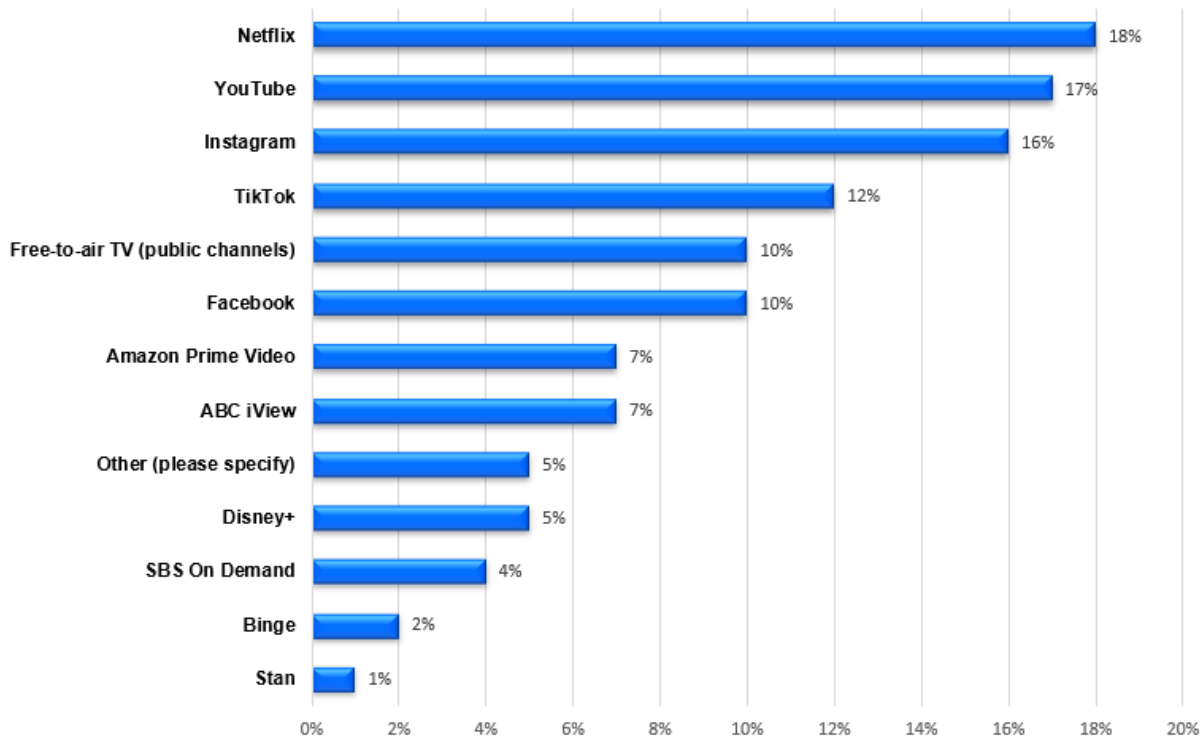


Figure 10. Preferred platforms for finding or viewing content.

This pattern reflects the age profile of the sample, but it should not be read simply as the disappearance of public broadcasters. ABC and SBS appear as content sources in open-ended responses and remain important institutions for news, multilingual programming and culturally diverse content. The more precise finding is that public broadcasters are often encountered through digital pathways: catch-up services, clips, social sharing, search, recommendations and on-demand viewing. This point directly responds to the need to tie KQ3 platform analysis back to the earlier evidence that ABC and SBS are still named and valued by respondents.

Why these platforms?

Platform choice is driven by accessibility, convenience and relevance. Global streaming services offer on-demand viewing, subtitles, international catalogues and bingeable content. YouTube and TikTok provide personalised feeds and culturally specific material created by users, influencers, community commentators and overseas media organisations. For CALD audiences, these platforms are attractive not only because they are convenient, but because they make it easier to access multilingual, diasporic and culturally specific content that may not appear prominently in Australian broadcast schedules.

Content discovery is increasingly shaped by algorithms and peer networks. Respondents cited platform recommendations as one way they find new content. Netflix, YouTube, TikTok and other platforms can surface culturally relevant titles, but they can also narrow the field of discovery or stereotype user preferences. Friends, family members and community networks also remain important. In migrant households, recommendations may travel through family conversations, group chats, diaspora social media pages and community organisations, not only through formal media advertising.

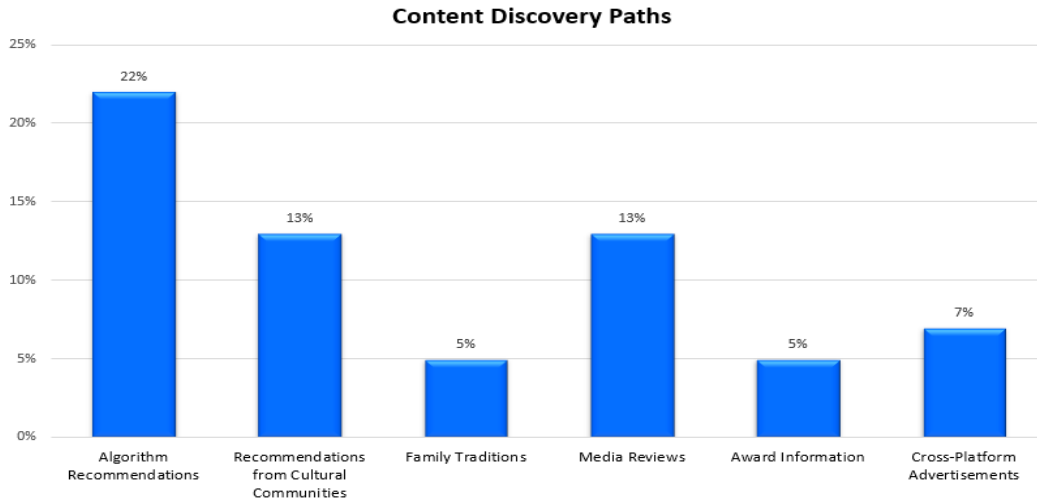
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Figure 11. Content discovery paths

Traditional TV usage:

The time-spent data indicate light engagement with free-to-air television compared with streaming and social media. Many respondents reported very low weekly use of free-to-air TV, while streaming and social video occupied more hours. This trend needs to be framed carefully. It does not mean that CALD audiences reject Australian institutions. Rather, it means they are accessing screen content in a digital environment where linear broadcasting is only one possible route. For SBS and ABC, the strategic challenge is therefore not only to produce diverse content, but to ensure that this content circulates effectively across on-demand and social platforms.

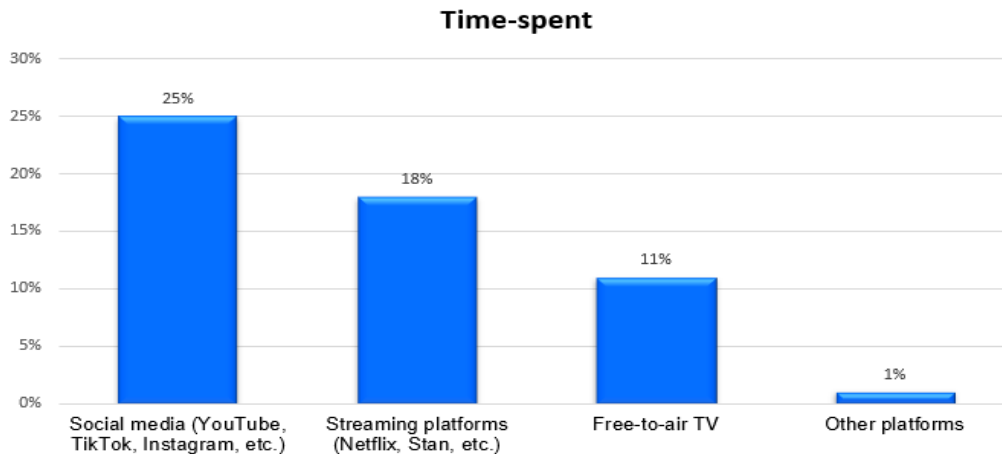


Figure 12. Time spent by platform type

Use of ethnic media platforms:

Ethnic and transnational media remain important parts of the wider platform ecology. Some respondents mentioned overseas streaming sites, ethnic news channels, community-specific outlets or regional YouTube sources. Chinese Australians may use platforms such as iQiyi, MangoTV, WeTV, WeChat video accounts or Chinese-language news sources; Indian Australians may use Hotstar, Indian YouTube channels or in-language news platforms; other groups may follow community Facebook pages, ethnic media organisations or multilingual news services. These examples show that CALD audiences often assemble their own platform mixes to meet language, cultural and informational needs.



Content discovery and trust on platforms:

When platforms recommend content related to respondents’ cultural background, reactions are generally positive or neutral rather than hostile. Some respondents actively engage with such recommendations, others have no particular response, and small number share the content with culturally similar or diverse friends. Very few said they deliberately avoid culturally targeted recommendations. This suggests that culturally relevant recommendations can be welcome, but only if the content is meaningful and not reductive.

Respond for recommends content related to cultural background

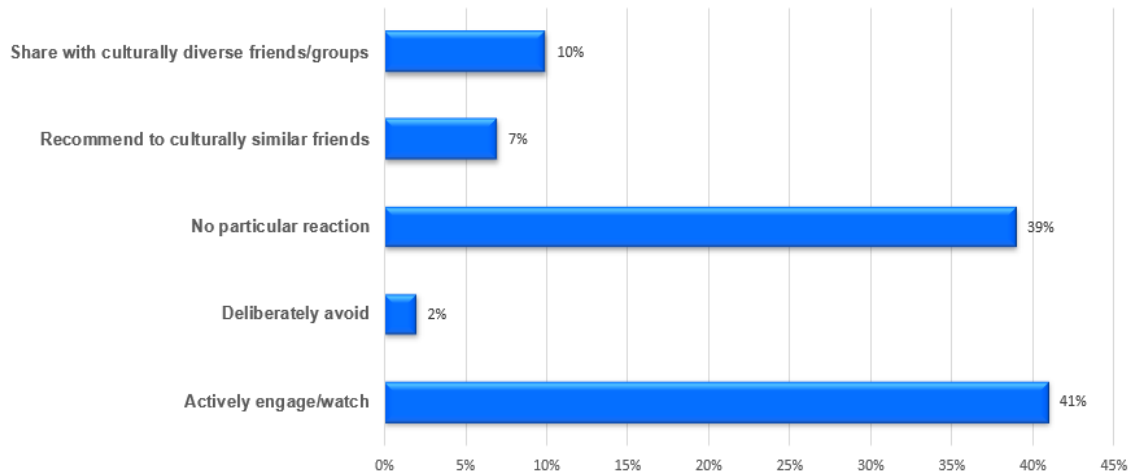


Figure 13. Responses to recommendations for content related to cultural background

On the other hand, these algorithms might not always get it right or could pigeonhole viewers. Our survey had a question: “When a platform recommends content related to your cultural background, how do you respond?” A majority of respondents reacted positively or neutrally: about 17% said they actively engage/watch such content, and a similar share had no particular reaction (neither excited nor opposed). A smaller subset would share it with friends of diverse backgrounds (indicating they like to use it as a conversation piece) or recommend it to culturally similar friends. Only a tiny number (around 1%) said they deliberately avoid culturally-targeted recommendations. This suggests that, generally, CALD audiences appreciate when platforms surface culturally relevant content – it’s seen as an opportunity to watch something reflective of their identity, rather than an unwelcome spotlight. This makes sense given 88% want cultural connection. However, they do have expectations that this content be authentic and high-quality (we’ll discuss this more under KQ4).

In summary, KQ3 shows that Asian Australian and other CALD audiences are primarily accessing content through on-demand streaming and social platforms, with very light use of traditional TV. They are savvy at navigating multiple services to satisfy their multilingual and multicultural appetites – whether it’s Netflix for a U.S. show, Viu for a K-drama, YouTube for community news, or SBS On Demand for a subtitled foreign film. This multiplatform behavior underscores the need for content providers to ensure diversity across all these channels. If Australian broadcasters don’t provide, the audience will simply turn to international platforms that do.

KQ4. Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives: Are they reaching CALD audiences?

KQ4 summary

Diversity initiatives are reaching audiences, but unevenly. Respondents value representation and report learning from diverse content, yet they are alert to tokenism. Trust depends on whether diversity becomes credible storytelling, not whether content carries a diversity label.



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Australian screen and cultural organisations have increasingly invested in diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, including funding programs, commissioning guidelines, representation goals and broadcaster policies. The key audience question is whether these efforts are visible, trusted and meaningful to CALD viewers. The survey suggests a mixed but highly informative picture: audiences welcome more diverse content, but they do not automatically trust diversity branding.

Audience awareness of diversity branding:

When respondents were asked how they react to diversity initiative labels, responses were divided. Only a small portion of respondents (10%) said that seeing such a label makes them trust the content’s quality more – presumably believing that if it’s supported by a diversity initiative, it might be more authentic or interesting. A larger group (about 37%) said they feel no particular response – the label doesn’t change their expectations one way or another. However, a significant number (34%) admitted that such labels make them worry about tokenism. This is crucial: many diverse audience members fear that when media touts its “diversity,” it might be token inclusion or a PR move rather than genuine storytelling. Additionally, about 20% respondents said they would actively verify the content’s authenticity upon seeing a diversity label – meaning they become more critical viewers, fact-checking or scrutinizing whether the cultural representation is accurate. These reactions highlight a degree of suspicion: DEI initiatives will not automatically earn the trust of savvy CALD viewers unless they deliver on authenticity. Taken together, these responses indicate that DEI branding does not in itself produce trust. Rather, it appears to act as a test of authenticity. For some viewers, such labels may be reassuring; for others, they trigger scepticism or closer scrutiny. This is an important finding because it suggests that **audiences are not responding simply to the language of diversity, but to whether diversity initiatives are translated into credible, nuanced, and non-tokenistic representation in the content itself.**

This scepticism is consistent with broader concerns in the literature about the gap between symbolic diversity and meaningful inclusion (Paramount ANZ, 2024; Screen Australia, 2023). Viewers may welcome more diverse content in principle, but they remain attentive to whether that diversity is expressed through authentic storytelling rather than promotional framing alone.

Table 3. Audience responses to diversity initiative labels

Audience response to diversity initiative labels	%	Interpretation
Trust content quality more	10%	Diversity branding can reassure a small group of viewers.
No particular response	37%	For many, the label is less important than story quality and execution.
Worry about tokenism	34%	A large group suspects diversity may be symbolic or promotional.
Actively verify authenticity	20%	Some viewers become more critical and check whether representation is credible.

This scepticism is well-founded in broader audience sentiments. A global study found that among viewers who feel poorly represented, nearly 6 in 10 say people like them are either not represented enough or are represented inaccurately on screen. In Australia, concerns often center on shallow or stereotyped portrayals – e.g. casting an Asian character but giving them no depth (the “diversity checkbox” approach) (Aaron, 2024). **Audiences today are quite adept at sensing tokenism. If they perceive a character or story was included just to tick a diversity box and not as an organic, well-rounded element, it can actually backfire and reduce trust. Our respondents explicitly worrying about tokenism reflects this.** They don’t want diversity efforts to be mere window dressing; they want them to result in authentic, relatable representation. Academic commentary supports this: true inclusion means not only showing faces of different colors but telling their stories with nuance and accuracy. As one commentary put it in relation to an analysis of the Asian American drama Beef, “more than ‘model minorities’: Asian migrants are allowed to have real emotions.” (Khorana, 2023). Therefore, representation is more than just identity – it’s about how groups are portrayed, avoiding stereotypes to give a sense of belonging.



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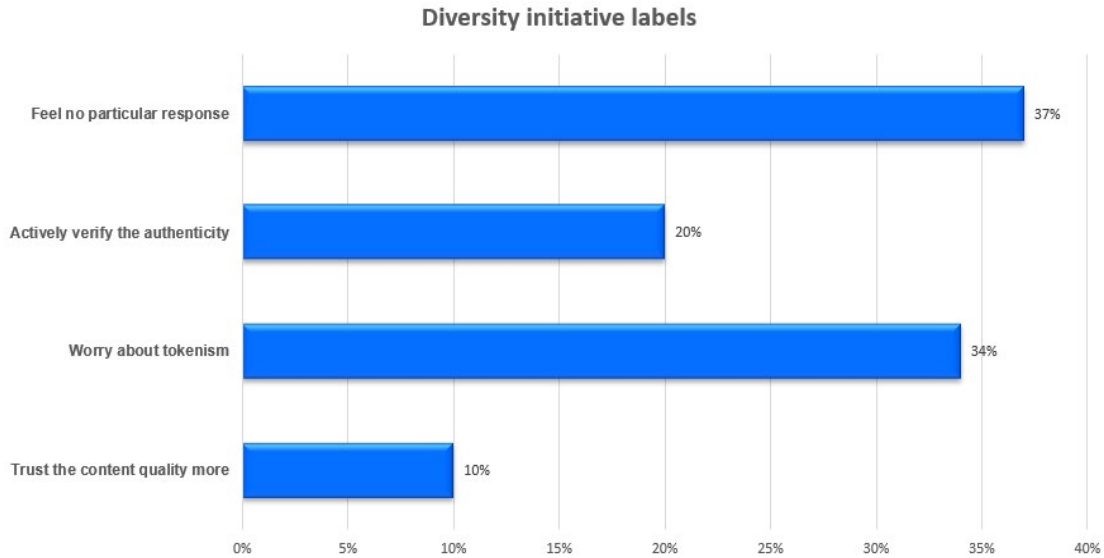


Figure 14. Audience responses to diversity initiative labels

This finding is important because it shows that CALD audiences are not passive recipients of industry diversity messages. They are active evaluators. They ask whether diverse characters are central or marginal, whether cultural details are accurate, whether communities are flattened into stereotypes, and whether the story has emotional and social depth. Audience indifference should not be read as rejection of diversity. It may indicate that some viewers prefer diversity to be normalised within good storytelling rather than advertised as a special feature.

Authenticity criteria:

The authenticity ranking provides one of the strongest findings in the report. Respondents clearly prioritise what appears on screen. Authenticity of cultural customs and details was among the strongest criteria, receiving the highest number of most-important rankings and the lowest mean rank. Historical accuracy was also highly valued, especially for stories set against specific political, migration or cultural events. Realism in character behaviour was similarly important, with respondents attentive to whether family interactions, humour, conflict, racism, social expectations and everyday emotional responses felt believable.

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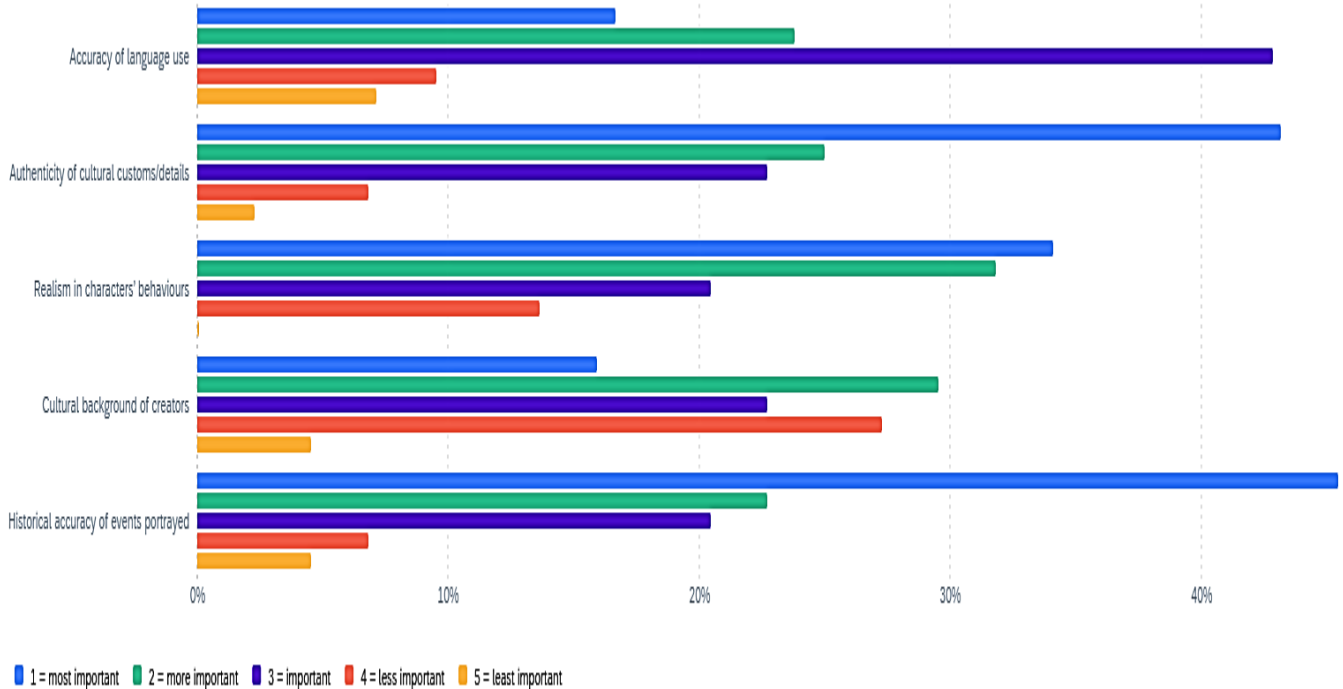


Figure 15. Ranked criteria for judging cultural authenticity

Looking across the rankings, respondents prioritised what appears on screen over who is behind the camera. Authenticity of cultural customs and details was one of the strongest criteria, receiving 41% of “most important” rankings and a mean rank of 2.0. Historical accuracy was rated similarly highly, with 44% ranking it as “most important” and a mean rank of 2.1. Realism in characters’ behaviours also stood out, with 32% selecting it as “most important” and another 32% as “more important”; no respondents rated it as “least important.” Together, these results suggest that audiences judge authenticity through cultural detail, historical context and everyday social realism, including whether family interactions, generational dynamics and responses to discrimination feel believable.

By contrast, accuracy of language use and the cultural background of creators were still valued, but slightly less central. For language use, the largest group placed it in the “important” category (41%), while 15% ranked it as “most important” and the mean rank was 2.7. The cultural background of creators was the least prioritised criterion, with 17% ranking it as “most important,” a mean rank of 2.8, and only 5% rating it as “least important.” This suggests that audiences value insider involvement, but they ultimately judge authenticity by the finished content rather than by creator identity alone.

Overall, authentic representation is better understood as an outcome, not simply an input. For diversity initiatives to be meaningful, they need to translate into stories where language, customs, historical context and character behaviour resonate with lived experience. When these elements are present, viewers are more likely to trust diverse content and the media organisations that provide it; when they are absent, diversity efforts may be read as superficial or tokenistic.

Reach of initiatives:

The survey also asked what kinds of cultural knowledge respondents gained from watching screen media. Almost all participants reported learning something, with only a small group selecting none of the above. The most frequently reported learning area was festivals and customs of other communities, followed by cross-cultural communication skills including language, appreciation for diverse values, histories of minority groups and cultural taboos. This suggests that diverse screen media can operate as an informal form of intercultural education.



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What cultural knowledge gained from watching screen media

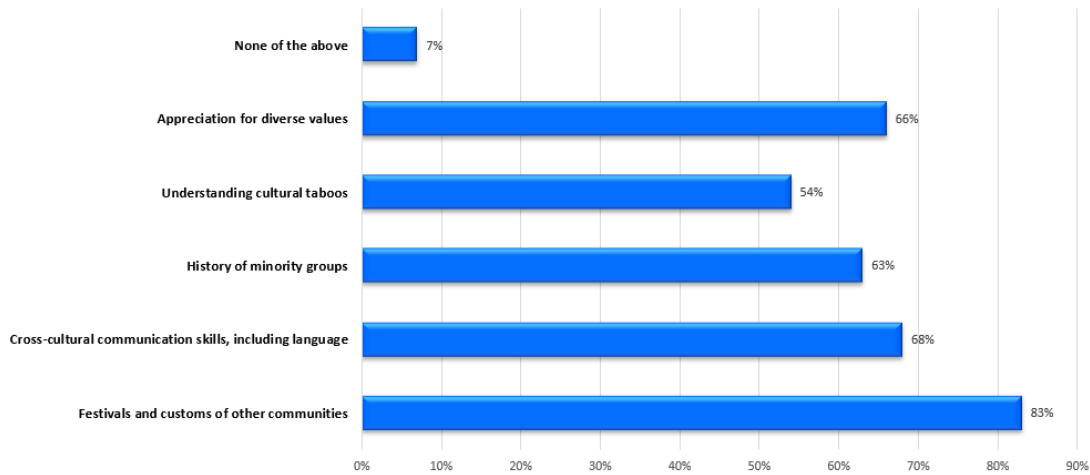


Figure 17. Cultural knowledge gained from watching screen media

At the same time, this finding needs careful interpretation. The dominance of festivals and customs suggests that much intercultural learning still occurs at the level of surface culture: food, ritual, celebration and visible practice. These are important, but they do not necessarily address deeper structural questions such as racism, inequality, migration policy, labour, intergenerational trauma or power. Therefore, the report should present this as a positive but incomplete impact of diversity content. DEI initiatives are reaching audiences and supporting cross-cultural understanding, but there is still scope to move beyond celebratory multiculturalism towards more complex stories.

Open-ended comments sharpen this point. Some respondents expressed a ‘seen but not heard’ concern: they may see diverse faces on screen but feel that people of colour remain side characters rather than narrative centres. One respondent wrote that ‘people of colour are only ever side characters in Australian media’, while another called for ‘a diverse cast instead of having a token POC’. These comments show that visibility alone is not enough. Audiences want depth, agency and narrative centrality.

Other comments reveal concern about stereotyping and flattening difference. One respondent called for ‘diverse representation that isn’t tokenistic’. Another noted that Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil communities are often collapsed together in media even though their languages and customs differ. This is a strong example because it shows that audiences are not satisfied with broad labels such as ‘South Asian’ or ‘multicultural’ when those labels erase internal difference. Accurate representation must recognise specificity within communities, not only diversity between communities.

Taken together, the KQ4 findings show a conditional form of audience engagement. **Respondents support diverse content in principle but respond most positively when diversity is embedded in meaningful storytelling. They are sceptical of symbolic labelling, token casting and over-generalised cultural categories. They reward authentic representation with trust, learning and potential sharing, but they may disengage when diversity feels superficial. The central conclusion is that diversity initiatives should be measured not only by production inputs or promotional language, but by whether audiences experience the content as credible, nuanced and relevant to lived experience.**

Highlighted finding: authenticity as the test of DEI

The report strongly emphasise that audiences judge DEI by textual authenticity: customs, history, behaviour, language and narrative depth. Diversity labels and creator identity are useful, but they do not substitute for believable representation.



Recommendations and Implications

Recommendation	Implication
1. Treat CALD audiences as mainstream, not niche.	The survey shows that multicultural and multilingual audiences are part of contemporary Australian screen culture. They should not be approached only through special initiatives or occasional ethnic programming.
2. Make diverse content discoverable across digital platforms.	Younger CALD audiences rely heavily on streaming, YouTube, TikTok, social recommendations and algorithmic discovery. Broadcasters and producers need platform strategies that match these viewing routes.
3. Protect and renew the role of ABC and SBS.	Public broadcasters remain important institutions for CALD audiences, but their relevance depends on digital delivery, multilingual accessibility, cultural specificity and stronger circulation of content beyond linear TV.
4. Move beyond representation as visibility.	Audiences want stories that centre migrant, multilingual, intergenerational and culturally hybrid experiences. Side characters, symbolic casting and generic multicultural labels are not enough.
5. Use authenticity as an evaluation benchmark.	DEI initiatives should be assessed by whether the final content feels credible to audiences: accurate customs, believable language, historical awareness, realistic character behaviour and narrative depth.
6. Support cultural specificity within broad diversity categories.	Communities are internally diverse. Producers should avoid collapsing groups into broad labels and should consult specific communities when representing language, religion, region, caste, ethnicity, migration history or family practice.
7. Expand stories beyond symbolic markers of culture.	Festivals, food and customs are important entry points, but diverse content also needs to address power, racism, migration systems, work, class, gender, disability, sexuality and intergenerational relationships.

Conclusion

This report shows that Asian Australian and CALD screen audiences are already navigating complex media worlds. They are young, urban, multilingual and digitally active. They combine Australian public broadcasters, global streaming services, short-form social platforms and ethnic or transnational media. Their viewing practices are not marginal to Australian screen culture; they are part of its present and future.

The strongest contribution of the survey is its account of hybridity. Respondents do not simply choose between Australian and overseas content, English and non-English media, public broadcasters and global platforms, or mainstream and ethnic viewing. They move across these categories depending on need, interest, language, family life and platform availability. This makes CALD audience research especially important for future screen policy, because it shows where audiences already are and how they judge the content they find.

The second major contribution is the report's account of critical audience engagement with diversity initiatives. Respondents welcome more diverse content and report learning from screen media, but they are alert to tokenism and cultural imprecision. They judge authenticity through cultural detail, historical accuracy, believable behaviour and credible language use. For the Australian screen sector, the message is clear: diversity must be visible, but it must also be translated into stories that are specific, meaningful and well crafted.



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