

Media literacy in 60 minutes:

How to help older Australians spot misinformation and find facts

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Information Association

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Ava Wang

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The internet, social media and generative artificial intelligence (AI) have upended the information ecosystem, allowing anyone with a digital device and an internet connection to instantly publish to the world with few guardrails for accuracy, independence, plurality or ethics. Engagement-driven algorithms and low-effort AI have allowed misinformation to flourish, threatening social cohesion, democratic processes, public health, disaster management, institutional trust, public order and civic debate.

This report details the development, application and evaluation of Australia's first known evidence-based media literacy learning resources for people aged 55 and over. Media literacy is a proven response to misinformation but, globally, few dedicated tools exist for older people, who are more vulnerable to manipulated, misleading and inaccurate information.

Our research team developed a one-hour short course, offered online and in person to 79 Australians, to determine how effective media literacy education is in reducing the reach and influence of misinformation among older Australians.

The training had an immediate impact on media literacy levels, which grew by an average 23% across demographics, and on critical thinking skills and confidence in media abilities. After three months, the impact of the course had diminished but nonetheless contributed to an uplift of 11% on initial scores.

Importantly, we found the course helped narrow the gap between those with better existing media literacy and confidence (left wing, educated, younger, city-living and born in Australia) and those with fewer skills (political centrists, less educated, older, living in regional areas and born overseas).

These results suggest that the course is an effective tool for teaching media analysis and evaluation skills to Australians aged 55+, as well as developing their critical thinking capacity, boosting their confidence in navigating online content, and building resilience to misinformation.

Based on the research, an education toolkit, *Stay Smart Online: How to spot misinformation and find facts*, was developed and pilot tested through libraries in partnership with the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). The toolkit includes training slides and presenter instructions, informational videos, tip sheets, quizzes, promotional flyers and evaluation forms. We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from library patrons and staff, combined with useful suggestions that were used to refine and improve the toolkit.

The enthusiastic uptake of the *Stay Smart Online* toolkit shows this project fills an important gap in media literacy resourcing and can be used to strengthen Australia's misinformation responses to help rebuild social cohesion.

KEY FINDINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Key findings

Short course impact

- Media literacy grew, on average, by 23% after the short course, with significant gains regardless of gender, education, age, location (regional or metropolitan), country of birth, political view, and whether a language other than English was spoken at home.
- Confidence in navigating online content, and the ability to distinguish between reliable and untrustworthy information, surged after the course.
- The course had a sustained, significant impact for people whose media literacy is generally lower, including older, regional, and less educated participants, as well as those who spoke a language other than English at home.
- Overall media literacy levels remained an average 11% higher even three months after the course.
- On the political spectrum, the course had the greatest impact on participants who identified with the political centre.

Stay Smart Online pilot program impact

- 97% of library patrons who took part in *Stay Smart Online* training would recommend the course to a friend.
- Pilot participants felt more confident across all subjects covered in the course but wanted to better understand AI.
- Just 10% of library professionals say they are well equipped to support media literacy¹ and those involved in this pilot program found our toolkit flexible and effective.

Opportunities

We recommend the *Stay Smart Online* toolkit developed for this study form the basis of a national adult media literacy program as a cost-effective, evidence-based and efficient way to address misinformation and help rebuild social cohesion.

1. The *Stay Smart Online* media literacy resources should be urgently scaled at a national level through appropriate funding and support.
2. Any adult media literacy program should approach media literacy as a life skill requiring life-long learning, embedding ongoing opportunities for the public to refresh and reinforce its media knowledge and expertise in response to rapid technological change.
3. Generative AI is an emerging, evolving and influential development in the information environment with significant implications for the spread of misinformation. There is an urgent need to develop and support generative AI literacy resources embedded in media literacy principles for the general population.
4. Face-to-face media literacy training is a valuable resource for older Australians who prefer in-person education. As part of a national adult media literacy program, a network of professional trainers should be established to ensure it reaches older, regional and other digitally under-served Australians.
5. The toolkit developed for this research should be adapted and tailored for media literacy-disadvantaged communities, including culturally and linguistically diverse and those living remotely.

¹ Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) & PressReader (2026). *Ready to Act: Media Literacy and the Role of Australia's Public Libraries*. Canberra: ALIA & PressReader, p. 6.

Misinformation is a growing threat to social cohesion. The proliferation and rising dominance of social media platforms and generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools have increased the public's encounters with inaccurate, manipulated and misleading content in an ever-more polluted and overwhelming information environment. This is disrupting democratic processes and civic engagement, public health, disaster management, personal finances, public order and institutional trust.

Across the world, Australians are among the most concerned about misinformation.² Older people are especially vulnerable to it. Half of all Australians aged 70+ have no ability to effectively verify information, while 54% of people in their 60s are in the same boat.³ Older people also lack confidence in their own media literacy skills, but few resources exist to help them. Meanwhile, the business model that underpins professional journalism continues to erode as trust in traditional news media declines, further undermining consensus around a shared set of facts that is essential to robust civic health.

Media literacy is a proven way to address the spread and impact of misinformation by developing citizens' critical thinking skills. Education to boost media literacy is largely untested among older people who had their formative childhood and early adult learning experiences before the advent of the internet and social media. Instead, media literacy interventions have traditionally targeted young people in schools and universities, and little is known about how well the lessons of those interventions survive the test of time. Yet older Australians are increasingly active online to shop, bank, consume information, and stay in touch with friends and family. It is in these virtual spaces they encounter misinformation.

To address these knowledge gaps, we developed a media literacy short course especially for Australians aged

55+ and tested its immediate and longer-term impact on how well they identified, challenged and verified misinformation.

Our findings informed the design and evaluation of Australia's first targeted, evidence-based, scalable media literacy resource for older people, titled *Stay Smart Online: How to spot misinformation and find facts*.

Key concepts

Misinformation

While ideas about misinformation vary, this study broadly defines misinformation as any false or misleading information which is presented as true, regardless of intent. Disinformation, which is sometimes considered separately for being deliberately false or misleading, is included under the umbrella term of misinformation for the purposes of this report.

Media literacy

Media literacy has evolved to include four types of literacies: media, information, news and digital. It encompasses a broad set of abilities enabling meaningful and critical engagement with content and technology across a range of media. It includes being able to access, analyse, evaluate and create all media types and messages with critical thinking at its heart,⁴ thus enabling active participation in society as an engaged and informed citizen.

² Park, S., McGuinness, K., Lee, J., Fulton, J., Fujita, M., Nolan, D., Fisher, C., & Nardi, G. (2026). *Digital News Report: Australia 2026*. Canberra: News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra, p. 153. <https://apo.org.au/node/334300>.

³ Park, S., Notley, T., Thomson, T. J., Hourigan, A., & Dezuanni, M. (2024). *Online misinformation in Australia: Adults' experiences, abilities, and responses*. University of Canberra and Western Sydney University. <https://doi.org/10.60836/jpmm-dw04>, p. 11.

⁴ Livingston, S. (2004). What is media literacy? *Intermedia*, 32(3), 18–20, p. 18; NAMLE. (2024). Media literacy defined. National Association for Media Literacy Education. Retrieved September 6, 2025 from <https://namle.org/resources/media-literacy-defined/>; AMLA. (2024). A media literacy framework for Australia. Australian Media Literacy Alliance. <https://medialiteracy.org.au/media-literacy-framework/>

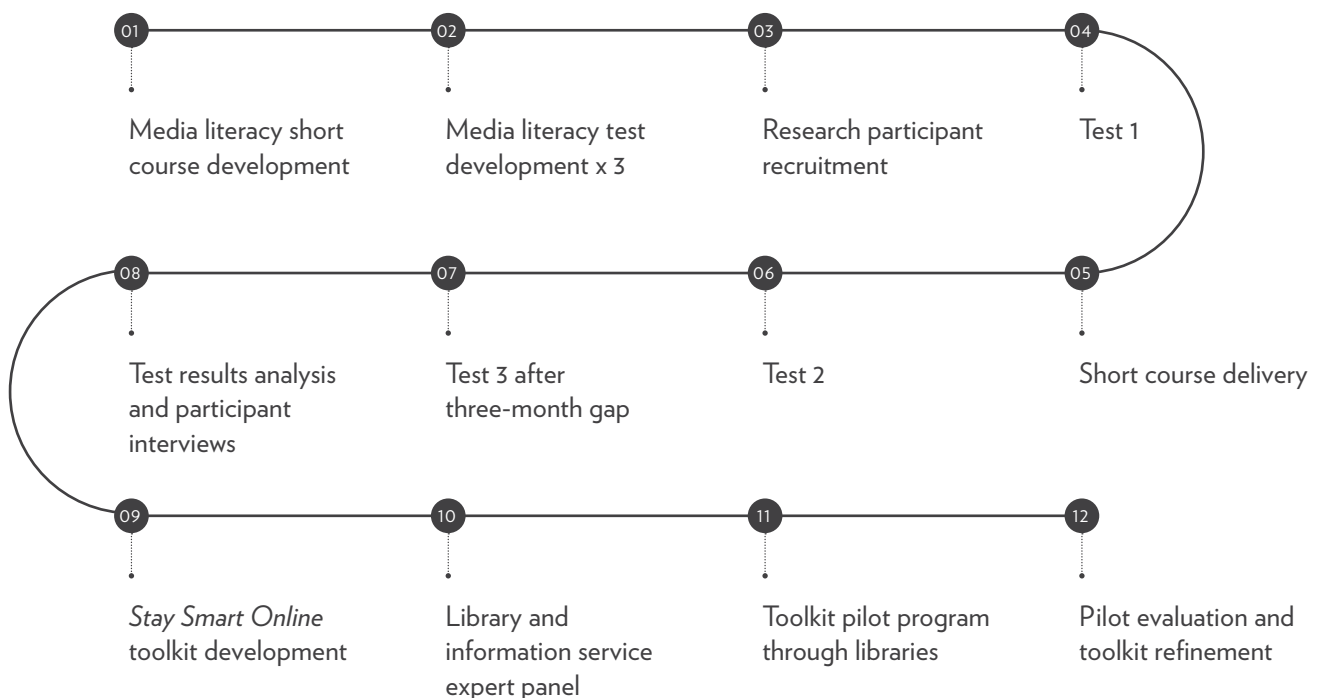
Older people

For the purposes of this study, older people are defined as residents of Australia born before 1970 and, at the time of the research, at least 55 years old. While this cohort encompasses a large cross-section of the nation's population, numbering more than seven million people,

all experienced their childhood and any school-based education before the world wide web was opened for public use and well in advance of the proliferation of digital devices, such as smart phones, and the launch and popularisation of social media platforms. Australian libraries have identified older adults as most at risk of media literacy challenges.⁵

The project design

FIGURE 1 The project design



⁵ Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) & PressReader. (2026). *Ready to Act: Media Literacy and the Role of Australia's Public Libraries*. Canberra: ALIA & PressReader, p. 8.

HOW TARGETED EDUCATION IMPROVES MEDIA LITERACY

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This section of the report outlines the impact of the short course on media literacy levels and misinformation receptivity immediately after and following a three-month gap.

Overall, the course:

- Immediately raised media literacy levels by 23% on average, reflected across genders, education, age, location (regional or metropolitan), country of birth, political views, and whether or not a language other than English was spoken at home;
- Boosted confidence in navigating online content and helped people distinguish between reliable and untrustworthy information;
- Was especially effective for people who identified with the political centre; and,
- Had a sustained impact for the media literacy disadvantaged,⁶ including those who are older, in regional areas, with less education, and who speak a language other than English at home.

FIGURE 2 Selected key outcomes of the media literacy short course

23% GROWTH

in overall media literacy levels

SUSTAINED IMPACT

for media literacy-disadvantaged

CONFIDENCE RISES

significantly in media abilities

Course is effective

ACROSS DEMOGRAPHICS

⁶ Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., & Dezuanni, M. (2024). *Adult media literacy in 2024: Australian attitudes, experiences and needs*. Queensland University of Technology, University of Canberra and Western Sydney University. <https://doi.org/10.60836/n1a2-dv63>, pp. 17 & 80-81.

Immediate jump in media literacy levels

Before taking the short course, study participants had roughly the same media literacy levels regardless of their background and attitudes. The only significant difference among average scores before training was rooted in political persuasion. Those who identified as left wing scored much higher overall before the course than those who were unsure of their political leaning, who registered the lowest levels.

Regardless of participants' circumstances and background, the media literacy short course was effective in significantly increasing media literacy levels.

Our results demonstrate that media literacy training is highly beneficial to people aged 55+. With a one-hour instructional session, participants' media literacy levels rose considerably. Before the course, the average score was 46.6 out of a possible total of 78.5 (Figure 3). On the second test, the average score rose to 57.4, a leap of 10.8 points. This represents a 23 percentage point increase and the impact was reflected across demographics and attitudes. In other words, regardless of personal circumstances and background, the short course was effective in increasing media literacy levels.

In line with previous studies showing that the impact of media literacy interventions diminishes over time, scores decreased after three months. The average score in the final test was 51.8 out of a total possible 78.5, representing a growth between the first and third tests of 11%—less than half that of the initial leap (Figure 4). However, it is important to note that media literacy levels remained, on average, significantly higher than before the short course.

FIGURE 3 Average total scores out of 78.5 in Tests 1 and 2

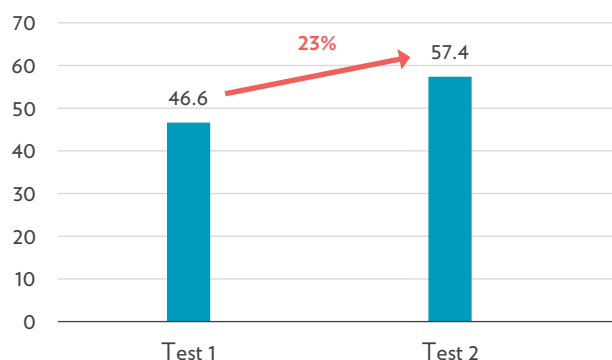
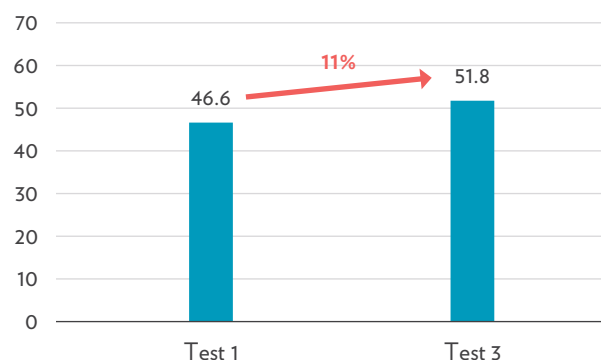


FIGURE 4 Average total scores out of 78.5 in Tests 1 and 3



Big uplift in evaluation skills and confidence

The tests were grouped into questions designed to gauge skill levels across the key media literacy dimensions of access, analysis, evaluation and creation, with a focus on analysis and evaluation. The growth in the total average score immediately following the course was driven especially by a rise in people's confidence in verifying content (32% growth, Figure 6) and an increase in evaluation skills (27% growth, Figure 5).

Evaluation questions were aimed at understanding how well people determined the reliability of content based on type, sources, presentation, language and other cues, thus testing their critical thinking skills. This suggests the training led to a short-term improvement in people's ability to effectively process misinformation by making them more likely to correctly identify unreliable content.

Our results also show media literacy education builds older people's confidence in spotting misinformation and

knowing what to do about it. Confidence rose in verifying sources, images and videos, as did people's comfort levels with their understanding of generative AI and social media algorithms.

Overall, confidence in media literacy and verification rose significantly between Tests 1 and 2 by 5.8 points of a possible 32.5 points (Figure 6). Participants also felt more confident they would take their perspective and bias into account when consuming information and media.

As expected, confidence decreased somewhat in Test 3, as did evaluation skills, the latter nonetheless recording a statistically significant 20% growth on pre-course scores. Confidence remained substantially higher after three months, though dipped from levels recorded immediately after the course. The consequences of a prolonged increase in confidence are important. Confidence in the media literacy context has been linked to increased civic participation, one of the known benefits of media literacy.⁷

FIGURE 5 Average scores out of 20 for evaluation skills

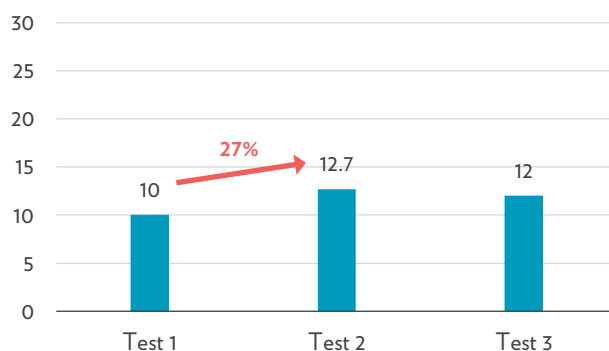
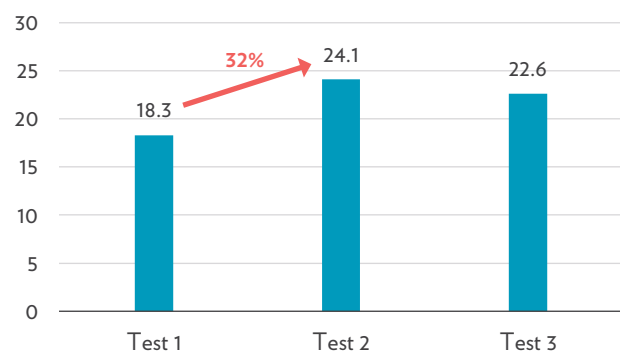


FIGURE 6 Average scores out of 32.5 for confidence in verifying content



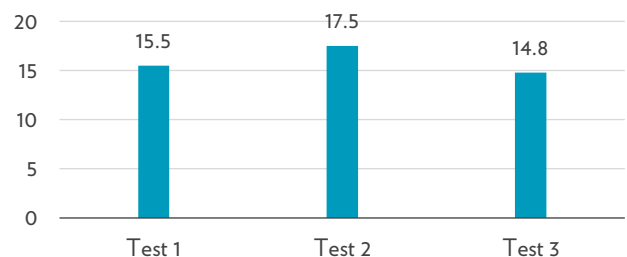
⁷ Park, S., Young Lee, J., Notley, T., & Dezuanni, M. (2023). Exploring the relationship between media literacy, online interaction, and civic engagement. *The Information Society*, 39(4), 250-261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2023.2211055>, pp. 256 & 258

Analysis and creation skills improved less

Average scores for the media literacy dimension of analysis, measured largely by people's ability to break down and categorise different content for subsequent evaluation, grew by nearly 13% between Tests 1 and 2 (Figure 7). Average analysis scores declined by a small margin between the first and final tests, but not enough to be significant.

Meanwhile, digital content creation skills, which were not a focus of the short course, were tested to ascertain how participants would react to misinformation on social media, including through sharing, emojis, verification, comments, off-platform—or not at all. Average scores grew by almost 12% for this competency between Tests 1 and 2, but fell slightly below pre-course levels after three months, though the difference was nominal (Figure 8). Given the minimal data available for this specific media literacy dimension, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the change in these scores.

FIGURE 7 Average scores out of 22 for analysis skills



The dimension of access was measured only in Tests 1 and 3 given the short space of time between the two initial tests. Access scores reflected the number and variety of media sources and platforms participants engaged with over the week preceding the surveys. While the mean score for this dimension did rise by 0.1 of a total possible score of 5.5, it did not rise enough to be significant (Figure 9).

FIGURE 8 Average scores out of 4 for digital content creation skills

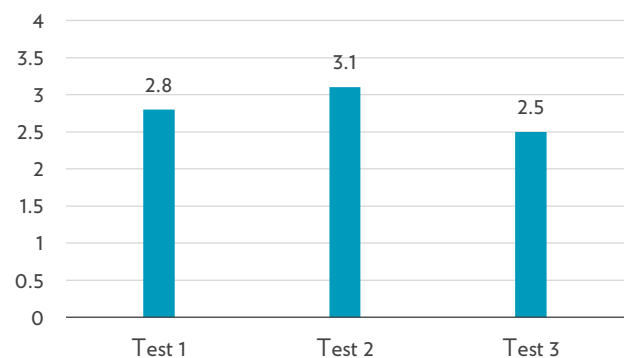
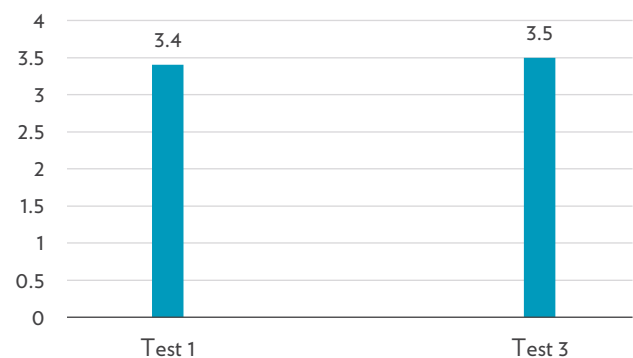


FIGURE 9 Average scores out of 5.5 for media access



Note that media access was measured only in Tests 1 and 3.

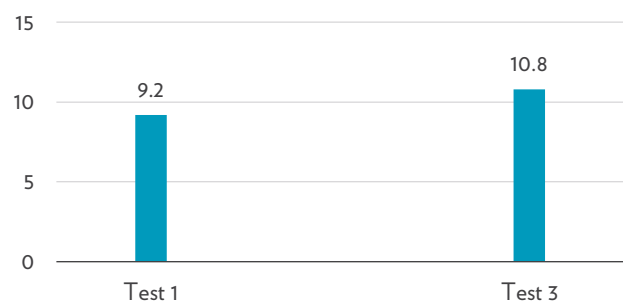
HOW TARGETED EDUCATION IMPROVES MEDIA LITERACY

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Participants' confidence in their digital content creation skills was also measured in Tests 1 and 3 (Figure 10). This question was excluded from Test 2 because the skills were not taught as part of the short course which focused on analysis, evaluation and critical thinking rather than developing practical abilities. Thus, these results are indicative only.

Participants were asked how confident they were in generating and sending text-based messages on social media, messaging apps and other digital platforms. They were also asked about their confidence in recording, sharing and editing images, videos and audio files. Of a total possible score of 24, the mean was 9.2 in Test 1 and rose by an insignificant 1.5 points in Test 3 (Figure 10).

FIGURE 10 Average scores out of 24 for confidence in creating digital content



Note that confidence in creating content was measured only in Tests 1 and 3.

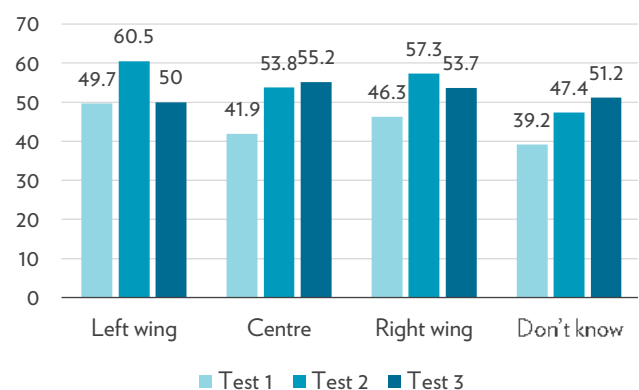
How political beliefs affect course outcomes

Media literacy levels rose for people of every political leaning, but they rose most for those clustered around the political centre. This suggests the short course can help build resilience to misinformation among the politically unaligned, ensuring they are making evidence-based decisions about their civic environment.

People who identified as left wing performed best in both the first and second tests (49.7 --> 60.5), followed by those who nominated themselves as right wing (46.3 --> 57.3, Figure 11). However, participants who saw themselves as political centrists recorded the most significant percentage growth in average scores between the two tests (28%), while those who weren't sure about their political leaning performed the worst in both tests and showed the smallest growth.

Our results suggest people with no strong political allegiances are more likely to retain the lessons of media literacy education for longer. While left wing people had

FIGURE 11 Average total scores out of 78.5 by political leaning



the highest levels before and immediately after training, political centrists had the highest scores after three months. This group actually recorded higher average media literacy levels in Test 3 than in Test 2. Similarly, those who weren't sure of their political leaning had a higher overall average score in the final test than in Tests 1 and 2—and outperformed participants who nominated as left wing.

Narrowing the gap: most in need get greatest benefit

People who are younger, better educated, live in cities and born in Australia generally have higher levels of media literacy and confidence in their media abilities.⁸ But our research shows that just 60 minutes of media literacy training can significantly level the playing field.

The demographic groups with a lower average total score in Test 1 saw greater gains after the short course. Three months later, these groups sometimes recorded higher total scores than those who performed best initially, showing they retained the lessons from training longer. This shows the media literacy advantage of younger, tertiary-educated, Australian-born, metropolitan-based people, as well as those with a left political leaning,⁹ is remedied with education and time. Older, less educated, overseas-born, regional-living people were more likely to maintain their gains.

EDUCATION

Overall scores rose more in Test 2 among those with a high school education or diploma compared with university-educated people (Figure 12). The latter group showed a 22% growth in scores between the first two tests, while less educated people achieved a 26% growth. The average score for tertiary-educated participants was slightly lower in the final assessment, and those with a school education or diploma maintained scores well above their initial results.

LANGUAGE AND BIRTH COUNTRY

Scores between Tests 1 and 2 rose more among people who spoke a language other than English at home (Figure 13), which shows great promise for helping culturally and linguistically diverse Australians with their media literacy. These participants recorded a 29% growth in average overall scores, compared to 22% among those who spoke English only. However, final scores were similar across the two groups.

FIGURE 12 Average total scores out of 78.5 by education

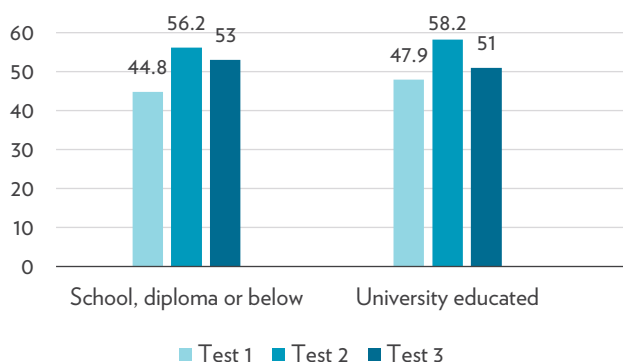
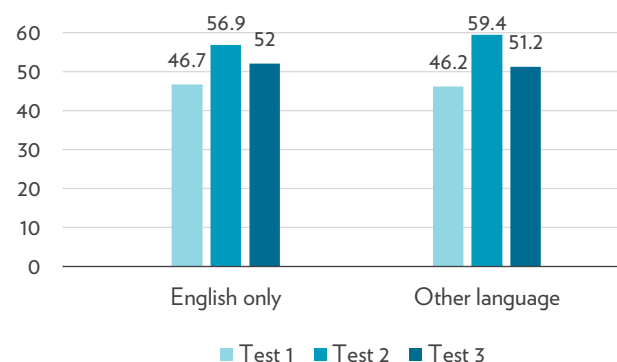


FIGURE 13 Average total scores out of 78.5 by language spoken at home



⁸ Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., & Dezuanni, M. (2024). *Adult media literacy in 2024: Australian attitudes, experiences and needs*. Queensland University of Technology, University of Canberra and Western Sydney University. <https://doi.org/10.60836/n1a2-dv63>, pp. 15 & 17

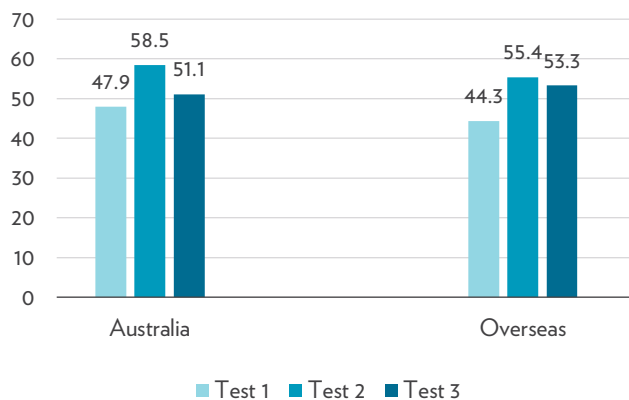
⁹ Park, S., Fisher, C., McGuinness, K., Young Lee, J., McCallum, K., Fujita, M., Haw, A., & Nardi, G. (2025). *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*. News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra. <https://doi.org/10.60836/md4e-k570>, p. 30.

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2 

The difference between results for people born in Australia and those born elsewhere was also greater. Overseas-born participants recorded lower average media literacy scores in both Tests 1 and 2 but showed larger improvements after the short course (Figure 14). They out-performed their Australian-born counterparts in Test 3.

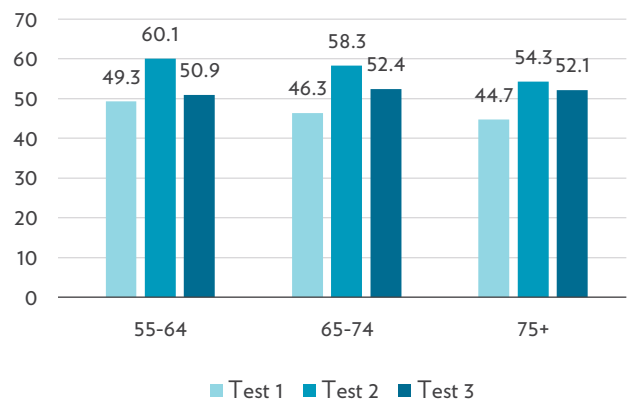
FIGURE 14 Average total scores out of 78.5 by country of birth



AGE

Three months after taking the short course, the youngest group (55- to 64-year-olds) scored the lowest on average, returning to almost pre-course levels (Figure 15). But participants in the 65- to 74-year-old and 75+ brackets maintained significantly higher results than their originals.

FIGURE 15 Average total scores out of 78.5 by age group



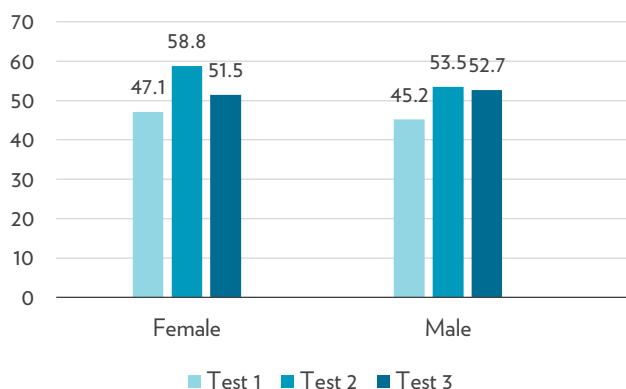
HOW TARGETED EDUCATION IMPROVES MEDIA LITERACY

2

GENDER

Men better retained the lessons of the course over time, recording a slightly higher score overall than women in the final test despite scoring lower, on average, in both Tests 1 and 2 (Figure 16).

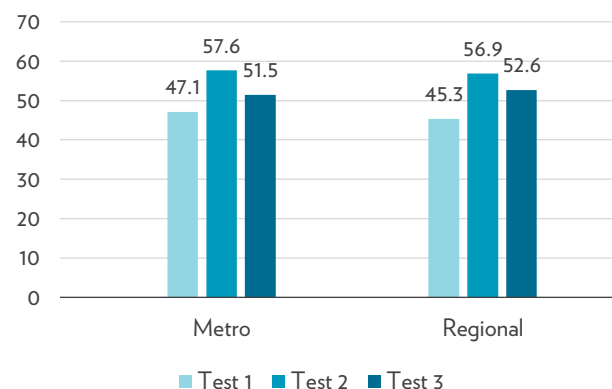
FIGURE 16 Average total scores out of 78.5 by gender



LOCATION

Media literacy scores were slightly higher after three months among people from regional areas than those who lived in cities (Figure 17). Despite beginning with a lower average total score before the short course, regional and rural dwellers performed similarly to their metropolitan counterparts in the final test, suggesting the location of participants did not have a significant impact on longer-term learning outcomes.

FIGURE 17 Average total scores out of 78.5 by location (metropolitan or regional/rural)



STAY SMART ONLINE: MEDIA LITERACY TOOLKIT PILOT PROGRAM

3 ✓

The findings outlined in the previous section of this report informed the development of a media literacy education toolkit designed to make the short course available to older Australians through civic institutions, such as public libraries, and community groups.

The toolkit is evidence-based, robustly tested and designed to be as flexible as possible while retaining its research-backed integrity. It includes an adapted and locally customisable short course slide presentation, six complementary videos, tip sheets and quizzes for participants, feedback forms, and promotional material. Through this project, it has been tested with library patrons and staff via a pilot program. Libraries were recruited through ALIA and the NSW Public Libraries Association (NSWPLA).

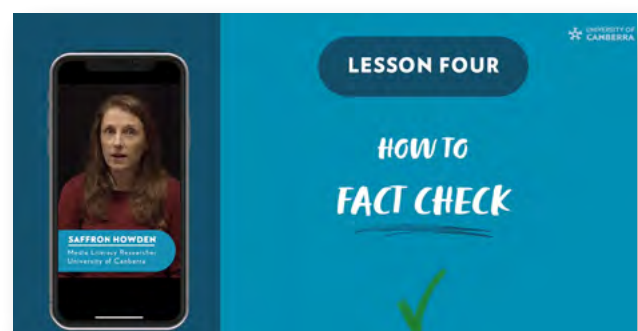
FIGURE 18 Promotional flyer for the *Stay Smart Online* pilot program



FIGURE 19 The tip sheet handout for *Stay Smart Online* pilot program participants



FIGURE 20 A snapshot of *Stay Smart Online* toolkit video IV, 'How to factcheck'

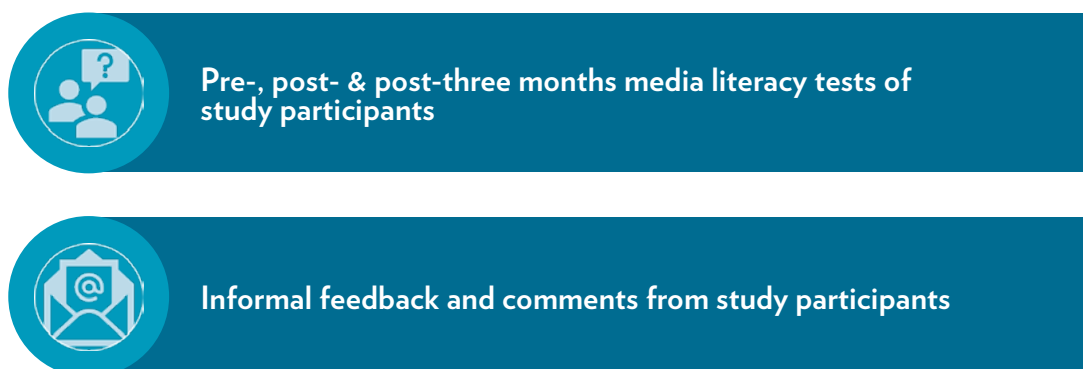


We evaluated the process and progress of the research short course to inform the creation of the media literacy education toolkit pilot program. This pilot program has also been evaluated. Ongoing evaluation of the toolkit has been an important part of its development and has involved multiple stakeholders, including research participants, library and information experts, as well as library patrons and staff.

Evaluating the media literacy short course

As noted previously, media literacy performance was evaluated for the 79 research participants through tests before, immediately after, and three months after taking the course. We also received verbal and email feedback and comments from participants during and after the course sessions. The feedback helped inform the toolkit.

FIGURE 21 How the media literacy short course was evaluated through research participant performance and feedback





Examples of email feedback from research participants

“Thank you for the work you put into your session today. I appreciated the clarity of your explanations, the well prepared slides and the pace of presentation. Your enthusiasm and engaging manner did not go unnoticed either.”

“I so much enjoyed the workshop today and have been chatting this evening with friends about the importance of building our confidence through education.”

“Your comment on ChapGP [sic] etc where you mentioned asking a question regarding a windfarm shocked me that the answer was based on if the question was positive or not. I shall certainly be sharing that information with family and friends.”

“You presented a solid, informative session, nicely paced and tackled all the areas all should be aware of.”

“My one piece of feedback would be that i think it works best as you talking to people rather than as an interactive session. There are risks in people expressing their personal perspectives—you handled it beautifully today but if the plan is to roll out the session far more broadly one day it might be hard to manage. It does mean there is a lot of you talking and some challenges working out how to break that up—maybe more clips?”

“Congratulations! The session was really useful. You have a delightful presentation style—relaxed and engaging and very easy to listen to. The examples you used illustrated the points you were making really effectively.”

Evaluating the *Stay Smart Online* toolkit

The short course formed the basis of the *Stay Smart Online* media literacy toolkit. A pilot program was then rolled out through libraries and feedback was captured from both library patrons and staff to evaluate its effectiveness, as well as to refine and improve the toolkit.

We first recruited a panel of library program experts to assess early versions of the toolkit. This was done to ensure the course was user friendly for course participants and presenters. Their feedback and suggestions led to an improved public-facing language style, greater flexibility to localise select components for audience relevance, and handouts for participants summarising core content.

Following this, the *Stay Smart Online* pilot program ran from October to December 2025, extended due to demand until April 2026. Libraries self-nominated to take part following targeted online information sessions hosted by ALIA and the News & Media Research Centre, as well as promotion at the NSW Public Libraries Association (NSWPLA) 2025 annual conference. Early feedback prompted minor adjustments to the toolkit, including printable resources, and recommendations for audience size and course presentation structure.

Feedback and data were collected from two sources to evaluate the toolkit: library staff who delivered the program and their patrons who took part. Two questionnaires were used, including one for patrons and one for library staff. Over the course of the evaluation period, 75 patrons completed the survey in full and 10 library staff. In addition, some libraries emailed comments directly to the research team and others conducted their own manual surveys. These provided valuable insights for toolkit improvement.

By the end of April 2026, 18 libraries had delivered the short course to their patrons (across 10 regional and eight metropolitan branches). Other libraries delivered the course without completing formal evaluation. Of the 200+ participants we received formal feedback from 75.

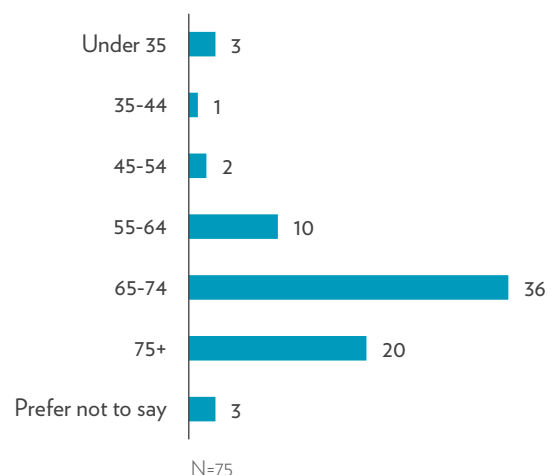
How the pilot program was received by library patrons

97%

of patrons would recommend the course to a friend (73 out of 75).

The results from the patron questionnaires were primarily positive and contained thoughtful comments for course improvement. Most of the cohort was aged 55+, although some participants were younger (Figure 22).

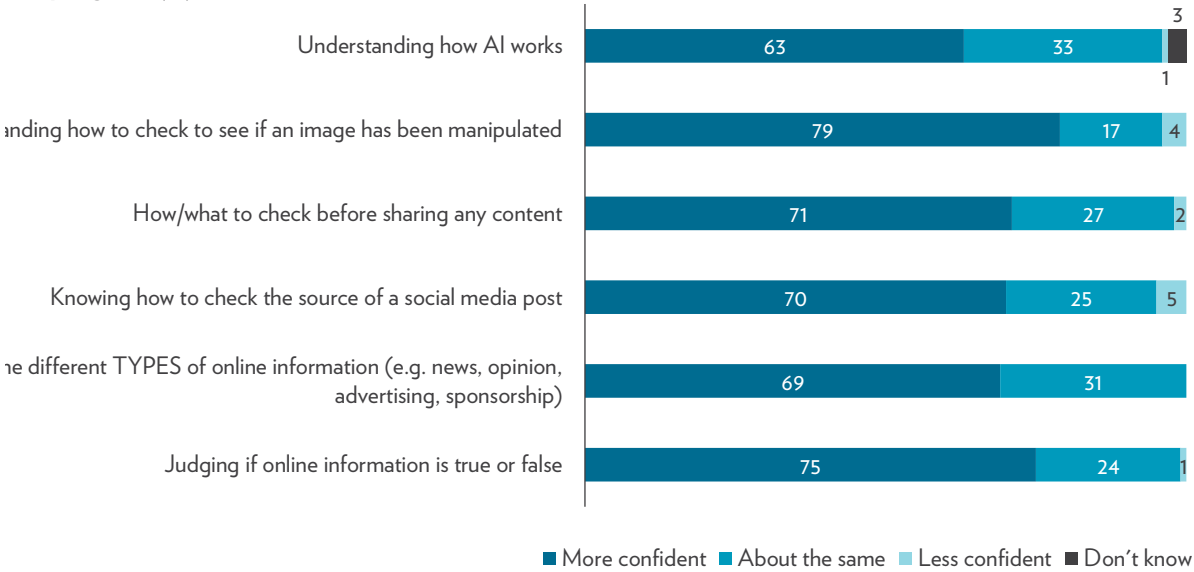
FIGURE 22 Age of library patrons who took part in the *Stay Smart Online* pilot program



In **Question 1**, we asked if confidence levels in media literacy had changed as a result of the short course (Figure 23). In all areas there was a demonstrable increase in confidence, although ‘Understanding how AI works’ had the smallest rise, with more people saying their confidence level was about the same in this category.

The AI responses (63% more confident; 34% about the same; 1% less confident; 3% don’t know) suggest that a useful future initiative would be to develop a specialised training resource that focuses on generative AI literacy.

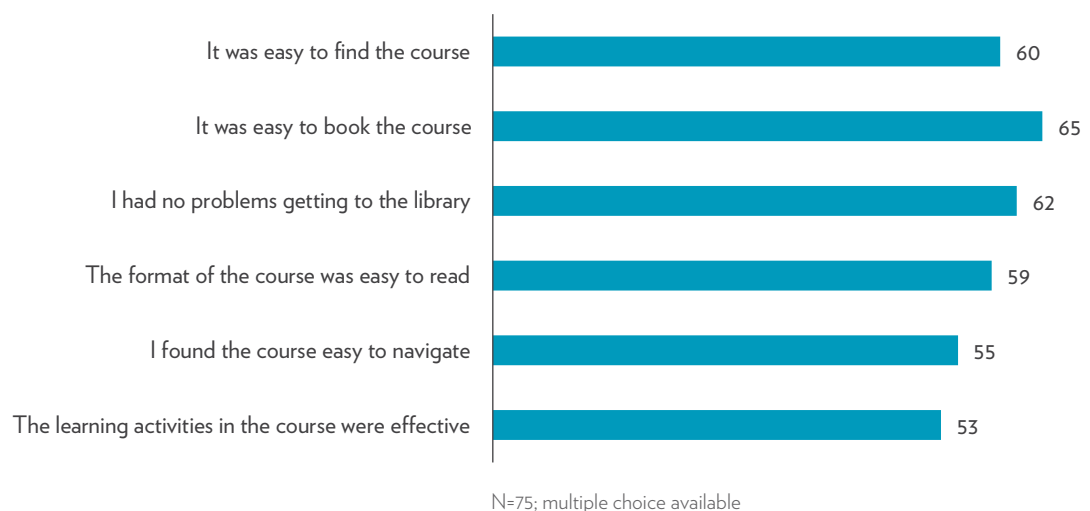
FIGURE 23 Increase in confidence among library patrons who took part in the *Stay Smart Online* pilot program (%)



N=75

Question 2 included several categories about the course and how participants accessed and navigated the course. The first three categories were about the host library, and the final three categories were about the pilot program resources (Figure 24).

FIGURE 24 'About the course' responses among library patrons who took part in the *Stay Smart Online* pilot program



When asked to comment further, program participants offered feedback which ranged from enthusiastically positive to thoughtful critiques.



The library patrons were asked to comment on the most valuable thing that they learned from the program and their answers are visualised in the word cloud below (Figure 25).

The information about how to do a reverse image search to find the origins of an image online was the topic most commented upon.

FIGURE 25 How library patrons who took part in the *Stay Smart Online* pilot program answered the question ‘What is the most valuable thing you learned today (knowledge or skills)?’



N=60

“Most valuable was teaching how to check veracity of content online”

“Having a checklist of questions to ask about any content I’m reviewing. e.g. what do other sources say.”

“How/what to check before sharing any content so that I do not send false information to my friends.”

“I don’t think there was anything specific that I learned, more so it was a lot of confirming and exploring more in depth things I knew so I have a lot more of an understanding to the point I feel confident teaching others but also the WHY behind things.”

“The self-bias in searching and traps in giving back info biased towards our views—confirmation bias (contrary to scientific method).”

Other comments mentioned factchecking, how to verify information, being cautious, the importance of critical thinking, AI search bias and personal bias.

Another question we asked was how the course could be improved (Figure 26).

FIGURE 26 How library patrons who took part in the *Stay Smart Online* pilot program answered the question ‘What can we do better?’



N=32

Responses to this question included comments about the length of the program (too long or too short), concision, and time for interaction and engagement.

“More concise with opportunities for interaction in class.”

“Presentation needs to be more automated (more like BeConnected website) & shorter with a little less repetition.”

“Redesign content to be more succinct. Less on the different types of information and more on recognising AI.”

“Increase the time for the one to one session from 1/2 hour to 45 minutes. 30 minutes is too short. As it stands now just as you are getting into your problem your time is up. 45 minutes is a more efficient time frame and it is more likely that your problem will be solved. In a 3 hour period the time can be divided in 4 sessions of 45 minutes. This is much better from a consumers point of view.”

“Longer time frame for more engagement.”

How the pilot program was received by library staff

Research shows that only 10% of library professionals report being well equipped to support media literacy.¹⁰ Those who participated in our pilot program found our toolkit easy to deliver, flexible and effective.

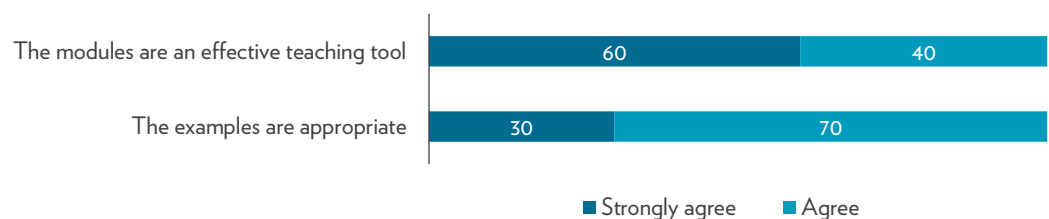
Out of the 18 libraries that delivered the program, we received 10 formal survey responses from library staff. These surveys were anonymous, so the location of the libraries is not known. The following discussion includes comments from both the surveys and emails from library staff involved in the pilot.

Overall, library staff:

- were very happy with the results;
- found the course simple, well-structured and easy to run;
- noted reverse image searching was most interesting to their patrons; and,
- felt they had to manage some awkwardness with slides that included political content.

Trainers agreed or strongly agreed that the short course and examples used were effective and appropriate (Figure 27).

FIGURE 27 How library staff who delivered the *Stay Smart Online* pilot program rated its effectiveness and examples used (%)



N=10; there was no responses for Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, or Strongly disagree.

¹⁰ Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) & PressReader. (2026). *Ready to Act: Media Literacy and the Role of Australia's Public Libraries*. Canberra: ALIA & PressReader, p. 6.

When asked what worked well in their sessions, trainers mentioned the effectiveness of the examples, the connection to real life, the mixture of tools available for the presentation, and the flexibility.

“Mixed delivery—powerpoint with some videos so they don’t tire of the one presenter. Stopping for questions and discussion. They loved learning about reverse image searching. Applying the skills to general esafety awareness.”

“Feedback showed the anecdotal examples were appreciated, along with the videos and the handouts. And the space to allow questions and comments.”

“Connecting to real life examples helped the participants to connect with and understand the content.”

“Anything that engaged and encouraged audience participation. The simple stuff was great ... carrot, pumpkin. The reverse imaging also piqued their interest.”

Importantly, there were suggestions to improve accessibility of content. One trainer suggested changing the font and slide colours to ensure patrons with dyslexia were able to participate comfortably. Another noted that they 'do tend to get a few people in who have had strokes so maybe sessions designed to go through less but be shorter sessions and go a little bit deeper?' Trainers also suggested other handouts, links to further information on some topics, and a clearer structure tied more closely to learning objectives.

Survey respondents who delivered the program in a single session commented on the presentation length, reflecting some patron concerns.

"Last part about personal bias didn't work well, it might be both presenter and participant were losing attention at the end of the presentation."

"Too many slides and too many words in the script. Even though the content was good quality, I think in the library setting it needs to be much shorter. It was also a little repetitive in places and sometimes the structure was a little unclear."

"I think a much shorter version would be great for a library setting. Probably more like 20 slides, with a much shorter script as well."

"I tried to follow the script, but found it very difficult to focus on it and on the audience. It's a very long script for some slides, and did start to feel a little repetitive towards the end."

However, some library staff adopted presentation styles to best suit their audience, including one whose patrons primarily spoke English as a second language, or who were learning English. Another trainer also expressed appreciation for the flexibility of the program and the ease of navigation. Overall, the program was well received by library staff.

“The flexibility of the program setup will make tailoring each program to different communities much easier.”

“How the information was added to the toolkit and provided to library staff has been very easy to navigate and find what is needed. It also made my task of highlighting the essential tasks for onboarding staff easier. The easy link access was also appreciated.”

“Seniors were very engaged and came with (many) questions. I made sure to ask participants what things they were hoping to learn so I could touch on all subjects and expectations. I decided to cut up the presentation significantly, a lot of participants had extra questions about navigating computer and internet (basic questions). I added more examples of different kinds of online info and examples of misinformation, utilising humour to keep things engaging.”

“Just wanted you to know we ran this program today and it went exceptionally well. We had 23 participants and all were very engaged with what they were learning. I went through it a few times beforehand and changed some of the language that wasn’t natural to the way I speak but other than that, I really enjoyed doing the delivery.”

Suggestions for improvement included practical advice which has been used to refine the toolkit to ensure it is as useful and effective as possible in real-world environments.

“Having the slides numbered on the screen would help with ensuring I am on the correct page for information. The videos provide a great wrap up of information. Would be great to have some of these imbedded with the powerpoint.”

“I would change the way the YouTube video is embedded if possible or use a different video as I had to skip over it a couple of times in regions where I couldn’t connect to the internet. Or I would skip over it for time as you can’t skip YouTube ads when it is embedded in a PowerPoint. In hindsight I could have found it on YouTube beforehand and closed the PowerPoint to show the video and then brought it back up afterward.”

“Maybe handouts or links to other information could be given to find out more about particular topics? I would also consider changing the section on verifying information to be done ‘live’ during the session. I think a clearer structure would be good as well, with the sections clearly relating to the outcomes listed on the second slide, and then a brief recap that ties in.”

LIMITATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

5 

Limitations

The media literacy short course was built for this study to be delivered as an instruction-based learning experience. With funding, the course would benefit from additional interactive elements and further opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. It would be highly beneficial to adapt this project's resources for a self-paced, online learning environment that incorporates tailored feedback to align them more closely with adult learning principles, which include self-direction.¹¹

Recent studies have found people's resistance to misinformation is not sustained unless interventions to address it are reinforced over time.¹² It is increasingly widely recognised media literacy requires a lifelong learning approach with regular opportunities to update knowledge and skills to suit a rapidly evolving digital landscape. Any scaled resources should embed ongoing learning in their development.

Finally, the research component of this study involved a small sample size of 79 participants, included more women than men, and had a disproportionate number of university-educated research subjects. While the data and insights generated are rich, significant and sufficient to achieve real-world impact, additional data from the continued rollout of the toolkit and future iterations of the intervention will be essential to Australia's ongoing media literacy efforts to build misinformation resilience.

Next steps

- Scale the resources developed through this research to ensure national reach, embedding lifelong learning opportunities.
- Develop specific generative AI literacy adult learning resources based on our research-backed toolkit.
- Establish a national network of professional trainers via a train-the-trainer program.
- Adapt the toolkit as an online, self-paced media literacy course.
- Tailor the program for media literacy-disadvantaged groups, including culturally and linguistically diverse, people living with a disability, First Nations, and remote residents.

¹¹ Knowles, M., Holton III, E. F., Robinson, P. A., & Swanson, R. A. (2020). *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development* (9th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429299612>

¹² van der Linden, S. (2023). *Foolproof: Why we fall for misinformation and how to build immunity*. London: 4th Estate, pp. 222 & 224.

This section of the report outlines the steps taken to develop the media literacy short course and pilot program toolkit based on rigorous testing and ongoing evaluation.

Project design

The project involved five main phases:

- media literacy short course development
- course rollout in urban and regional, online and in-person settings
- assessment and evaluation
- follow-up in-depth interviews¹⁵
- toolkit development and pilot program through libraries.

Phase 1:

A media literacy short course (60 minutes, offered in person and online) was developed to teach research participants how to adopt a critical approach to content online.

Phase 2:

A total of 79 participants aged 55+ were recruited from metropolitan and regional Australia using a convenience sampling approach. Participants were recruited through traditional news media, targeted social media advertising, and public libraries using ALIA networks.

Phase 3:

Participants had their media literacy levels tested three times: pre-course, post-course, and three months post-course. Following the first test, the short course was delivered to participants via 16 online seminars and four in-person sessions held in public libraries. Data was evaluated after each test, and an overarching analysis was completed to prepare the *Stay Smart Online* media literacy toolkit.

Phase 4:

Follow-up, in-depth interviews were conducted with seven participants to provide the groundwork for analysis of how individuals in this age group connect with, relate to, and engage with information and misinformation in their daily lives.

Phase 5:

A media literacy education toolkit was developed including a short course, instructor guides, video resources, and evaluation forms. The toolkit was tested in a pilot program through select public library branches via the ALIA network and continues to be made available to additional libraries.

¹⁵ This report does not include data from the in-depth interviews.

Participants

How research participants were recruited

Recruitment for the short course began in early October 2024 through news media coverage in regional Australia and Canberra, national age-targeted social media advertising through Facebook, promotional flyers distributed to ALIA members Australia-wide, direct contact with various culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) organisations and community groups, a dedicated web page on the University of Canberra’s News & Media Research Centre site, and by word of mouth.

In total, 79 Australian residents from across the country who were born before 1970 enlisted to take part. The course was delivered via 20 separate sessions throughout November 2024—16 over Zoom video call and four in person at public libraries in North Sydney, Parramatta and Dubbo in NSW, and Canberra in the ACT.

All sessions were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. A \$25 generic gift voucher was offered as an inducement for each participant who completed all three tests and the short course. All participants provided their express consent to take part in the research and there was no attrition thanks to the robust communication strategy adopted by the research team.

About the research participants

Through survey questions, we established participants’ age, gender, country of birth, geographical location (regional or metropolitan), education level, whether a language other than English was spoken at home, and media consumption habits. We also asked about their political leaning. (See Table 1).

TABLE 1 The demographic characteristics of research participants

Variables	Categories	Number	%
Gender	Female	58	73
	Male	21	27
Education	School or diploma	33	42
	University educated	46	58
Age	55-64	24	30
	65-74	26	33
	75+	29	37
Country of birth	Australia	51	65
	Overseas	28	35
Metro/regional	Metro	57	72
	Regional	22	28
Political leaning	Left wing	40	51
	Centre	14	18
	Right wing	18	23
	Don't know	7	9

Short course development and delivery

The short course was designed to build critical thinking skills and develop competencies in the core media literacy dimensions of access, analysis, evaluation and creation. In line with the successful, long-running Civic Online Reasoning curriculum from the Digital Inquiry Group, it broadly taught participants to ask:

- Who's behind the information?
- What's the evidence?
- What do other sources say?

In addition, it drew on other successful misinformation and media literacy interventions from around the world¹⁴ and adapted these for an older Australian audience. The course showed participants how to differentiate between content types, such as news, opinion, advertisements, and official communications. It demonstrated verification techniques for multimedia, including images and videos, and promoted reliable and expert sources. The importance of relying on the consensus of evidence and relevant expertise was emphasised. Generative AI large language models were explained, as well as the impact of prompt bias, and the way social media algorithms work to keep users engaged.

FIGURE 28 A slide from the media literacy short course outlining its learning objectives



¹⁴ Guess, A. M., Lerner, M., Lyons, B., Montgomery, J. M., Nyhan, B., Reifler, J., & Sircar, N. (2020). A digital media literacy intervention increases discernment between mainstream and false news in the United States and India. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*, 117(27), 15536–15545. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1920498117>, pp. 15541–15542; Moore, R. C., & Hancock, J. T. (2022). A digital media literacy intervention for older adults improves resilience to fake news. *Nature Scientific Reports*, 12(6008). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-08437-0>, pp. 7–8; Fisher, C., Park, S., Holland, K., & O'Neil, M. (2019). *News Media Literacy: What Works & Does it Make a Difference? (Final Report)*. Unpublished report. News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra, pp. 39–44

The module reinforced the overall reliability of information from government agencies and reputable news outlets in the Australian online landscape to guard against so-called ‘deep doubt’,¹⁵ the phenomenon whereby raising awareness of misinformation can lead to general distrust of all information.

It showcased examples of misinformation and the techniques used to create and disseminate it, as well as the potential motivations behind it. Based on the theory of intellectual humility—which is essentially accepting there are limits to one’s knowledge—the influence of an individual’s beliefs and life experiences on information processing was emphasised.¹⁶

Also incorporated were findings from recent research identifying potential drawbacks of misinformation

interventions. For example, people tend to view misinformation as an issue for others and need to be convinced of the relevance of the problem to them. They also need to trust the source of the intervention.

Delivered over 60 minutes using PowerPoint slides with accompanying instruction from a presenter, the course gave participants structured opportunities to ask questions and interact with the presenter and each other.

The theories of inoculation and intellectual humility provided the framework for the course development, while adult learning principles, as well as social and experiential learning theories, underpinned its delivery.

FIGURE 29 A slide from the media literacy short course outlining how to adopt a critical thinking approach to online content



¹⁵ Hameleers, M. (2024). Is the alarm on deception ringing too loudly? The effects of different forms of misinformation warnings on risk perceptions of misinformation exposure. *European Journal of Communication*, 39(4), 360–374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231241271015>, pp. 361, 371–372; Evon, D. (2024, September 26). Misinformation dashboard updates: Is it AI or is it authentic? News Literacy Project. Retrieved October 9, 2024 from <https://newsilit.org/updates/misinformation-dashboard-updates-is-it-ai-or-is-it-authentic/>

¹⁶ Bowes, S. M., & Fazio, L. K. (2024). Intellectual humility and misinformation receptivity: A meta-analytic review. *Advances in Psychology*, 2. <https://doi.org/10.56296/aip00026>, pp. 1, 2–4, 19, 20–21; Facciani, M. (2025). *Misguided: Where Misinformation Starts, How It Spreads, and What to Do About It*. Columbia University Press, pp. 11–13

Topics used as content examples

Three topics were used as examples in the tests and short course: health, personal finance and renewable energy. In the Australian context, climate change, health and political campaigns are the most likely target subjects for misinformation.¹⁷ Meanwhile, older people are increasingly turning to the internet and social media to access health information. Financial misinformation has proliferated in the digital age alongside the rise in online financial transactions and digital currencies, including in Australia.

Measuring media literacy levels and resilience to misinformation

To gauge the baseline level of media literacy among study participants and to track any change as a result of the short course, a media literacy test was developed based on the following competencies, or dimensions:

- access (news, media and social media consumption in the past week);
- analysis (ability to break down and classify content);
- evaluation (determining content reliability and verification tendencies); and
- creation (technical competencies).

Confidence in media literacy abilities was also tested through a series of questions regarding participants' self-reported comfort with, for example, verifying images or videos online, identifying AI-generated content, creating and editing content themselves, and recognising their own bias.

While access and creation competencies were measured, the focus of the test questions was on analysis and

evaluation skills, as these were the media literacy dimensions covered in the short course. The course did not, for example, teach participants how to set up a social media account (access) or capture and edit a video or image (creation). However, it did introduce practical verification tools, such as reverse image searches, to assist with content evaluation.

The tests used a combination of simulated content and relevant real-world examples from public social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube, as well as Australian news publishers, Google Search, and the generative AI chatbot, ChatGPT. They asked participants to, for example, distinguish advertisements from editorial content, spot potential misinformation, and categorise information published online as opinion, news or promotion, and so forth.

Taking Test 1 as a baseline measurement, the subsequent tests of comparable difficulty and style allowed us to establish any change in media literacy proficiency among participants through an outcomes framework. Examples used were modified between assessments to ensure media literacy skills, not memory, were tested.

The tests were delivered as online questionnaires distributed via email using survey platform Qualtrics. Following registration, participants were given approximately seven days to complete Test 1. After taking the media literacy short course, they were given another week to complete Test 2. Test 3 was distributed approximately three months after finalising Test 2.

Each piece of content correctly identified or classified attracted a maximum score of 2 and a minimum score of 0. For questions measuring critical thinking skills, points were awarded for demonstrating a propensity to take verification steps before making an evaluation of content reliability. Other questions, using a Likert scale, measured participants' confidence in tangible media literacy skills, such as verification and checking of other sources.

¹⁷ Carson, A., & Grömping, M. (2024). *Measuring, monitoring and diagnosing the impact of mis/disinformation to support future (non-legislative) policy development* (Australian Resilient Democracy Research and Data Network Discussion Paper 2). Australian National University. <https://polis.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/measuring-monitoring-and-diagnosing-impact-mis-dis-information-support-future>, p. 4.

FIGURE 30 A question from Test 3 asking participants to distinguish between advertisements and editorial content on the Yahoo News Australia website home page

Q6a. *Look at the content inside the box marked '1'.*

Is this an advertisement?



Ad - Health Insight Journal
Don't Struggle With Swollen Legs: Learn How to Drain Fluid Safely

Qualitative questions were also asked to gain a better understanding of how people aged 55+ interact with media and information. Each qualitative question was scored on a scale of 0 to 2, where 0 represented low media literacy, 1 represented moderate media literacy, and 2 represented high media literacy.

ABOUT US

News & Media Research Centre

The News & Media Research Centre specialises in research exploring news consumption, the changing media environment, and the impacts of social and digital media on society. It is focused on producing high-quality industry and government facing research while building on its record as a world standard contributor to academic understanding of the legal, ethical and social impacts of communication. The Centre is the home of the annual *Digital News Report: Australia* and provides open access to this and other reports on its website.

Australian Library & Information Association (ALIA)

ALIA is the national organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. ALIA's members are committed to digital and media literacy. In libraries across Australia, library staff daily assist people to connect, use services and seek information online.

With over 5,000 personal and institutional members, ALIA's purpose is to promote a strong library and information services sector for a thriving democracy. ALIA collaborates with a number of organisations in research, policy and advocacy projects and is a founding member of the Australian Media Literacy Alliance Incorporated and Australia Reads Limited.



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