



News Nation

**Why journalism matters
more than ever in 2026.**

9 in 10

Australians use news media today¹

3 in 4

Australians actively lean-in to journalism that matters to them²

Almost

2 in 5

Australians turn to news media to fact check information they see on social platforms like Facebook and TikTok³



Contents

- 04** Introducing News Nation
- 06** Key Research Findings
- 08** 2026: The Era of Conscientious Consumption
- 12** Journalism in Transition
- 16** Case Study: Gen Z in Focus
- 18** Case Study: Journalism and Critical Stories
- 22** Case Study: Why News Literacy Matters
- 24** Scroll and Slow Down: Journalism's High Engagement
- 30** Beyond Reporting: The Social Impact of News Media
- 34** Brand Safety Today: Educating and Debunking
- 38** The Case for Investing in News Brands
- 42** Final Reflections
- 44** Methodology and References

1. Roy Morgan Single Source October 2024 - September 2025. Digital audiences use Roy Morgan iris.
2. Think News Brands, *Media Moments Research: Measuring the True Value of Total News Publishing*, October 2023.
3. Sora Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025* (Canberra: News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra, 2025), 23, <https://doi.org/10.60836/md4e-k57>.

Introducing News Nation

Recent years have been defined by the so-called 'polycrisis' of persistent economic volatility, social polarisation, geopolitical tensions, and AI-driven transformation. Even in Australia, where geographic distance once offered some insulation, these forces are being felt, and it's reshaping daily life.

Alongside this, Australians are contending with unprecedented information chaos, largely driven by social platforms. These platforms offer fast access to trusted news media sources; but also, to creators, influencers and fake news accounts, and exposing audiences to an endless scroll of (mis)information. This forces people to filter through algorithmic feeds and navigate increasingly sophisticated AI outputs.

While social platforms offer speedy access to content, they leave people asking the question: *Can this be trusted?* In some instances, people rarely pause to question the integrity of information, instead taking it at face value. This is the paradox of a post-truth world: our initial access point or source to information also poses the greatest misinformation threat, and too often people don't stop to interrogate what they are seeing.

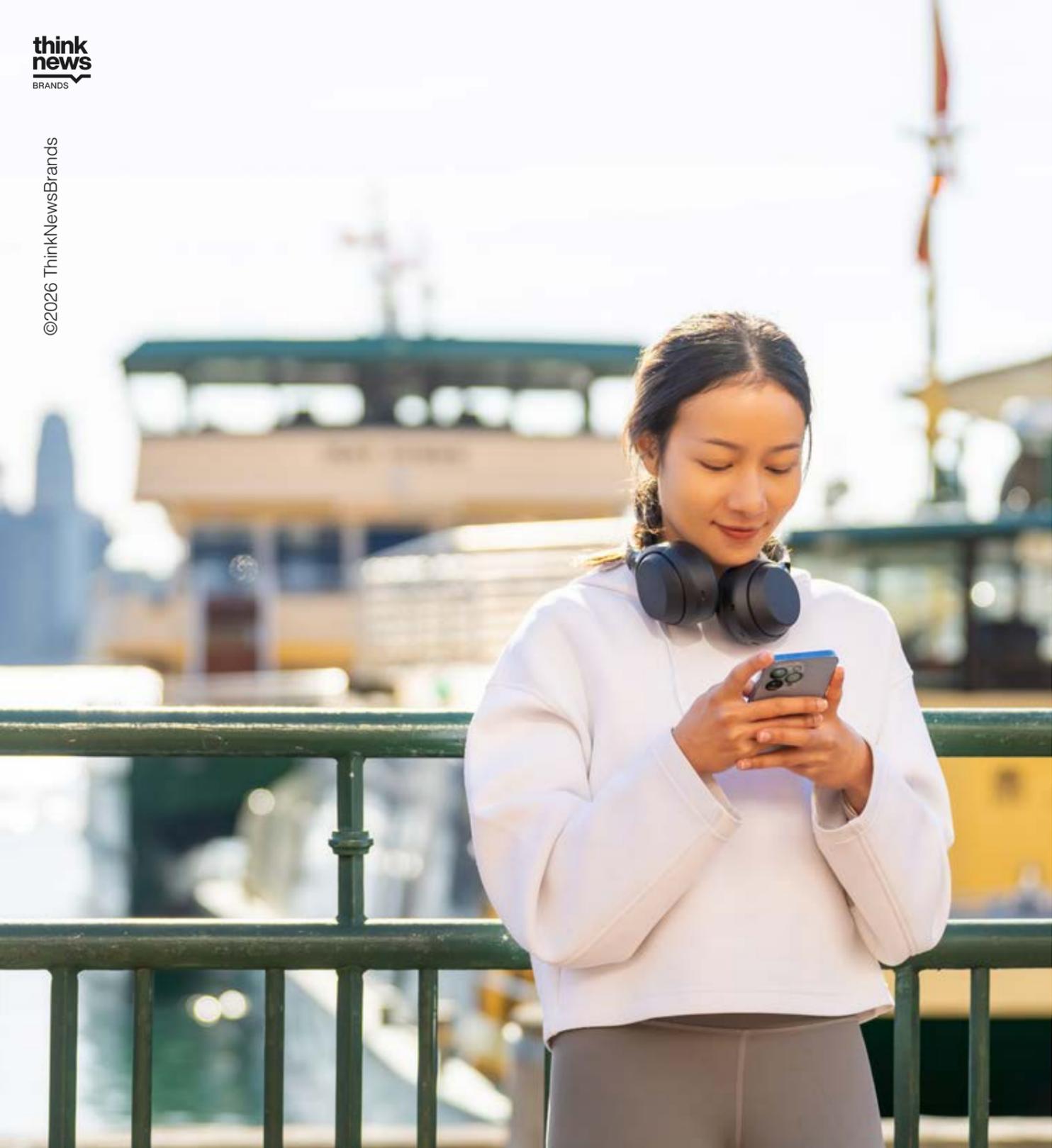
In this environment, journalism matters more than ever. Built on verification, accountability, integrity and standards, news media offers a counterweight to instability. It's one of the last remaining lean-in environments, where people tune in for trusted information, deeper context, and the deeply human stories that help us make sense of the world. At a time when information is everywhere but truth and trust are not, news media has become even more critical.

News Nation examines the role of news media and journalism in 2026. Drawing on eight studies conducted by ThinkNewsBrands, and supplemented by a body of Australian and international reports, it reveals how audiences engage with news media today: as a high-trust, high-engagement environment people turn to for clarity, credibility, and - critically - the facts to inform and sense-make.

It reinforces news media as critical public infrastructure in an age of fragmented information and attention

At a time when information is everywhere but truth and trust are not, news media has become even more critical.





Key Research Findings

Selective yet open.

One in five Australians are selective about the news media they consume, and this is even more **common among young people, where 26% are selective**⁴. But this doesn't mean they're turning away: people are trusting of news⁵, are spending more, and there's been an increase in subscriptions to news brands⁶. Even younger cohorts are consuming a larger number of news brands compared to older cohorts⁷.

Complex but critical.

Audiences are increasingly digital, unstructured and fluid in their news habits⁸, while **74% of Australians are worried about fake news on social platforms**⁹. But we shouldn't confuse this complexity with disengagement - **people are turning to news more than ever: nine in ten are engaging with it**¹⁰, while 43% of Australians trust news¹¹.

Scroll and slow down.

Over half of people begin their day with news, and three out of four see journalism as a way to focus, slow down, and avoid multitasking¹².

Journalism: the trusted source.

Australians are almost **two times more likely to choose written news over TV, radio, or social platforms** when staying informed on key events¹³, while around **two in five talk about turning to news brands to fact check information they see on social platforms**¹⁴.

High attention.

People pay close attention to journalism, with this providing a mental dividend: **News is 6.4 times more likely to be remembered**; and, for brands using news there's better recognition of the ad, better unprompted recall, and results in **3.5 times greater intent to act**¹⁵.

Brand safety myths.

There is no evidence to support brand safety concerns¹⁶. The metrics for measuring brand safety, which is where appearing next to harmful or inappropriate material could threaten reputation, do not extend to news media. In fact, the studies these concerns come from were focussed on social platforms, not news media. Recent studies show there's no negative impact to advertising in news media environments¹⁷.

4. ThinkNewsBrands, CrowdDNA, News Perceptions and Consumption Today Research, August 2025.
5. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 106.
6. Deloitte, *Media & Entertainment Consumer Insights 2025*, 14th ed. (2025), 6-8.
7. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 79.
8. ThinkNewsBrands, CrowdDNA, News Perceptions and Consumption Today Research, 23.
9. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 14.
10. Roy Morgan Single Source October 2024 - September 2025. Digital audiences use Roy Morgan iris.

11. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 79.
12. ThinkNewsBrands, Media Moments Research, 16.
13. ThinkNewsBrands, Media Moments Research, 17.
14. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 23.
15. Think News Brands, *The Youth Chapter: Why Advertisers Should Wake Up to News Brands When Targeting Under 40s* (2021), 12.
16. Gabriel Dorosz, *How News Advertising Reclaims the Brand Safety Narrative* (International News Media Association, November 2025), 6-7.
17. Think News Brands, *Exposing the 'Brand Suitability' Myth* (August 2024).

2026: The Era of ‘Conscientious Consumption’

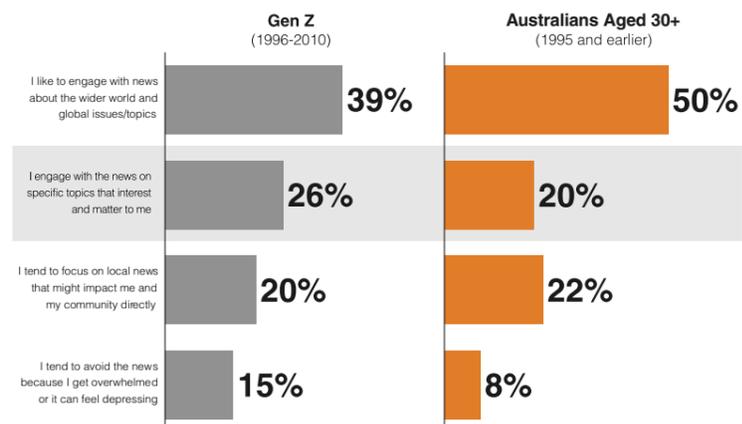
People take selecting their news sources seriously.

We live in a time where news, content and commentary are always on and constantly being refreshed. This can result in the feeling of drowning in information. In response, audiences are becoming more discerning, actively filtering out distractions in an effort to regain control.

Analysis shows that one in five Australians are now selective with what they are consuming, with this higher for Gen Z cohorts where 26% do this¹⁸.

One in five Australians approach news and information with a selective mental model, where they are discerning with what they choose to consume. This higher for Gen Z cohorts where 26% have this heightened selection criteria.

News consumption typology: By age group (%)



18. ThinkNewsBrands, CrowdDNA, News Perceptions and Consumption Today Research, 23.

But selectivity shouldn't be confused with not seeing value in subscribing or paying for news and content.

If it speaks to them, people are tuning in. From the data, we know that people are:

- > More discerning with what's being consumed
- > Increasing the number of news media and information services they've signed up for. The average subscriptions sit at 3.7, up from 3.3 last year, including an increase for news media services¹⁹
- > Spending more than ever on information and subscription services, sitting at \$78 up from \$63²⁰



“Sometimes you log on to social media and you're absolutely inundated. Like, there's so much, you just want to switch off.”

Male, 27

19. Deloitte, *Media & Entertainment Consumer Insights 2025*, 6-8.
20. Deloitte, *Media & Entertainment Consumer Insights 2025*, 6-8.

Conscientious consumption, driven by misinformed commentary on social platforms.

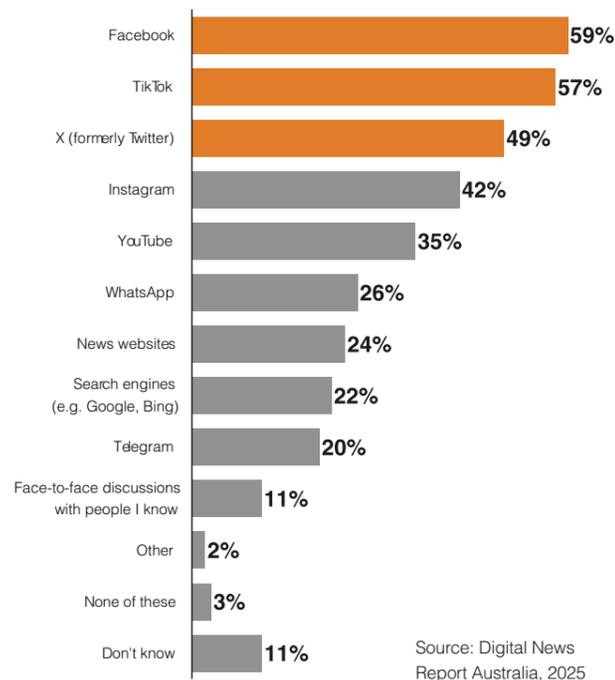
Social platforms are both the reason for, and can become sites of, Conscientious Consumption²¹. While they are important for trusted news brands to quickly disseminate and amplify breaking stories, it is more often seen as a place for passive scrolling. People feel there's a risk of spending hours on low-quality content, and even worse, exposure to misinformation.

We know that influencers and celebrities without affiliation to news brands are sources for misinformation, with 57% of audiences seeing them as a threat²². Additionally, platforms such as Facebook, TikTok and X, are specific high-risk platforms, posing a misinformation risk²³.

“I have a few people I look to follow – like The Daily Aus, The Age. But there are also sources you come across and you know you can't trust, so you just keep [scrolling].”

Male, 27

Platforms and channels that pose a major misinformation threat (%)



21. ThinkNewsBrands, CrowdDNA, News Perceptions and Consumption Today Research, 23.

22. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 19.

23. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 21.

News: The Facts.

In the search for credible content, people are becoming more active and discerning of what they choose to engage with on social platforms, curating a trusted set of sources to follow²⁴. Often these sources include a range of news brands and journalists – accounts people can trust. If they come across an unknown source or an influencer, they are more likely to scroll past rather than engage.

24. ThinkNewsBrands, CrowdDNA, News Perceptions and Consumption Today Research, 23.

In this time of fake news anxiety, people are turning to news media and journalism to sense-make, fact-check, and inform their truth:

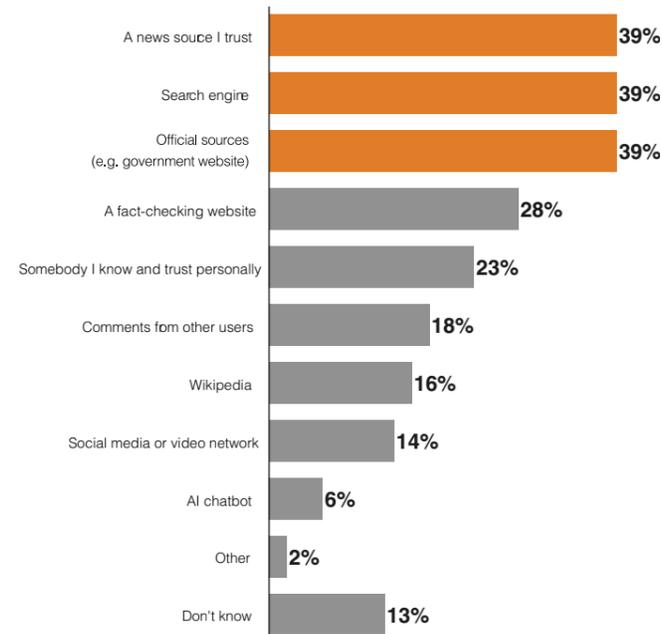
- > 78% of Australians see news media as trustworthy vs 36% social platforms²⁵
- > Almost 2 in 5 of Australians say they turn to news brands to check what they see on social platforms²⁶



News media might not have speed, but it has accuracy.

Information is everywhere - but truth and trust are not. Journalism, grounded in verification, accountability and independence, serves as a critical reference point to help people separate fact from fiction.

Sources people go to to verify information



25. Deloitte, *Media & Entertainment Consumer Insights 2025*, 31.

26. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 23.



Journalism in Transition: Complex, Enduring, Essential

News media exists in a complex, evolving space.

The last five years have been referred to as the ‘*unbundling of journalism*’²⁷. This term reflects news media’s shift online, and its impact on journalism delivery, particularly as newsrooms balance the demand for fast, breaking stories with the need for accuracy.

The same term also applies to the current shift in news media consumption. Audiences are increasingly digital, unstructured and fluid in their habits, while expressing growing concerns about misinformation.

27. Michele Bisceglia, “The Unbundling of Journalism,” November 2021.

The complexity surrounding journalism.

1. Discovery ≠ destination. Initial entry via social platforms are on the rise, but consumption happens with news brands.

44% of Australians access their news via social media, compared to 24% who go straight to publisher websites. But social platforms frequently serve as a gateway, directing audiences to news media sites where they spend time engaging with the journalism they value²⁸.

2. Written news is still preferred, though the ground is shifting.

Australians are still most likely to read their news (54%), ahead of watching (47%, which has declined in the last few years by 4%) or listening to it (28%).²⁹

3. What is news?

News is no longer defined solely by civic importance, but by personal meaning; in other words, if it matters to you, it’s considered news. This is reflected in the consumption data - people are eclectic news consumers, caring about both traditional, hard topics, as well as softer news like lifestyle, entertainment, technology and culture. While definitions of news expand, an underlying trust in journalism separates it from influencer and social platform opinion³⁰.

4. Misinformation anxiety.

Australia leads the world in fear of misinformation, with 74% of people saying it’s a key concern, with social platforms being the main threat³¹. This is the paradox of a post-truth world: the initial access point to information also poses the greatest misinformation threat.

28. Roy Morgan Single Source October 2024 - September 2025.

29. Roy Morgan Single Source October 2024 - September 2025.

30. ThinkNewsBrands, CrowdDNA, News Perceptions and Consumption Today Research, 20.

31. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 17.

But we shouldn't confuse this complexity with disengagement - people are turning to news more than ever.

High demand.

The appetite for news is strong: what's shifting is how people access it, not whether they access it.

News media still reaches almost nine in ten Australians weekly. This is only slightly behind social platforms (93%) and ahead of free-to-air TV (74%) and radio (80%)³².

Eclectic, multi-category news consumers.

The average Australian consumes three different news categories per week, and 40% engage with five or more.

There's a diverse set of interests - from general news (consumed by 84% weekly) to property (43%), sport (33%), entertainment & culture (31%), lifestyle & health (28%), business (24%), and beyond. This fits with the fluidity surrounding news – it's not one topic³³.

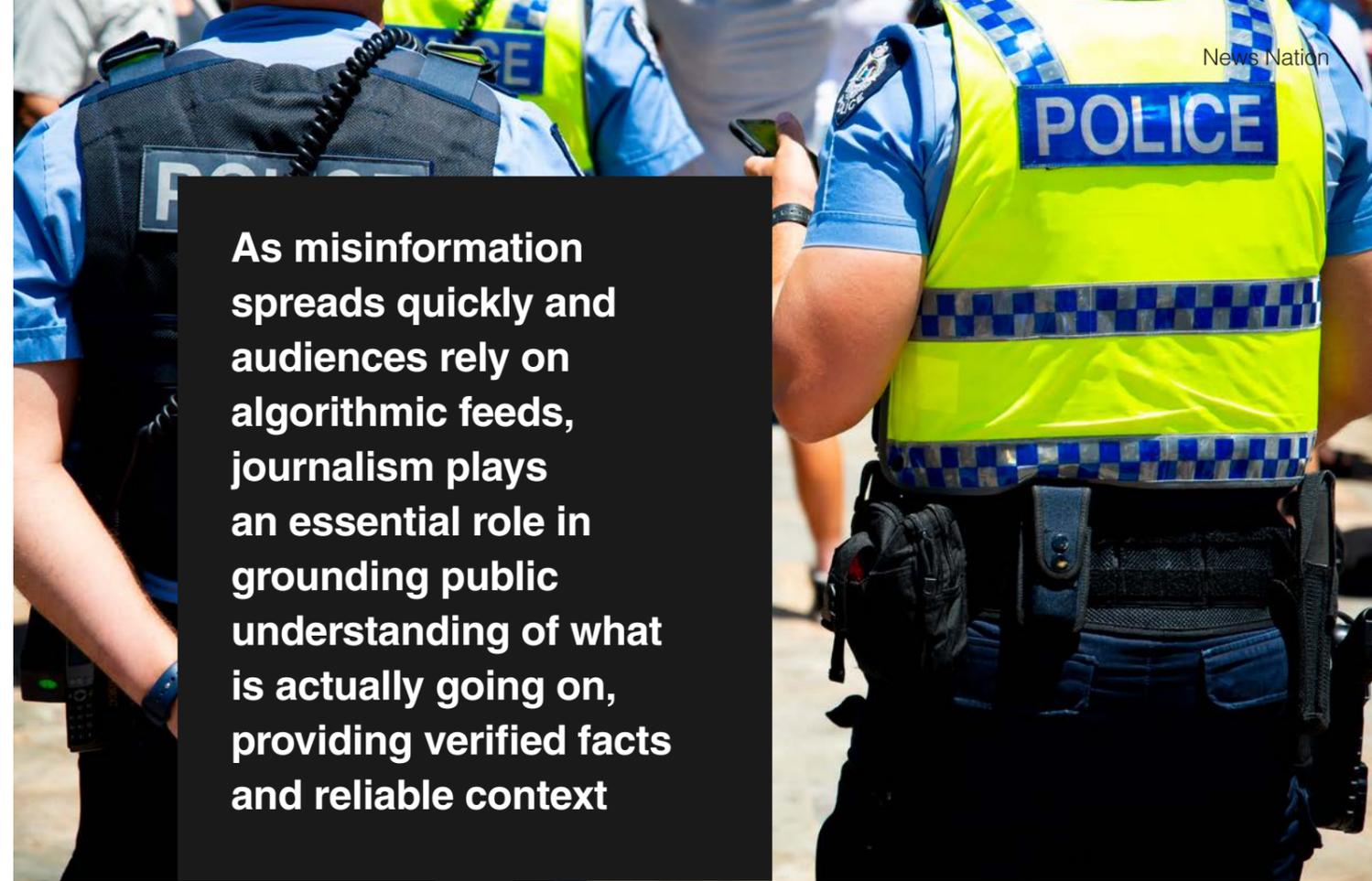
Younger Australians want it.

Gen Z consumes more news brands than older cohorts. Those under the age of 35 have the highest willingness to pay for digital news subscriptions across any age cohort and are open to AI-driven news innovations³⁴.

32. Roy Morgan Single Source October 2024 - September 2025. Digital audiences use Roy Morgan iris.

33. Roy Morgan Single Source October 2024 - September 2025. Digital audiences use Roy Morgan iris.

34. Park et al., Digital News Report: Australia 2025, 79, 127, 61.



As misinformation spreads quickly and audiences rely on algorithmic feeds, journalism plays an essential role in grounding public understanding of what is actually going on, providing verified facts and reliable context

People trust journalism.

As misinformation spreads quickly and audiences rely on algorithmic feeds, journalism plays an essential role in grounding public understanding of what is actually going on, providing verified facts, verified information, and reliable context³⁵:

- > 43% of Aussies trust news. This is an increase of 3+ since 2024. This is more than the number of Australians who say they distrust it (32%)³⁶
- > Two in five talk about turning to news brands to fact check information seen on social platforms³⁷
- > Australians are almost two times more likely to choose written news over TV, radio, or social platforms when staying informed on key events³⁸

35. ThinkNewsBrands, CrowdDNA, News Perceptions and Consumption Today Research, 23.

36. Park et al., Digital News Report: Australia 2025, 79.

37. Park et al., Digital News Report: Australia 2025, 23.

38. ThinkNewsBrands, Media Moments Research, 17.

“Those big organisations – like the AFR – they have time and people who look into stories – you know if it’s in there you can trust you know it’s going to be right.”

Female, 31

Journalism in Transition: Case Study

Gen Z in Focus

There's a common misconception that Gen Z doesn't care about news and journalism. That's simply not true.

The data tells a different story. While Gen Z are increasingly selective – with 1 in 4 only engaging with select sources on specific topics, and most accessing news media through social platforms – they are still engaged:

Diverse news diet.

56% use more than 5 news brands vs 39% for those 45-64. Gen Z use more news brands than older consumers.³⁹

Willing to pay.

29% are willing to pay for news vs 22% for the population average, up 10% YoY.⁴⁰ When news media feels relevant, accessible, and aligned with how they live, Gen Z is prepared to invest in it.

Appetite for innovation.

37% of young Australians are open to news produced by AI vs 14% for the rest of the population⁴¹, backed up by recent qualitative work that Gen Z are curious to news media AI offers⁴². This highlights green shoots to engage younger audiences in news media and journalism, especially as AI is integrated into the everyday news experience.

Gen Z 'worthy' news: a focus on transparency, balance and credibility.

Gen Z has shifting news priorities, favouring journalism that is balanced and unbiased coverage (38%), fast news (37%), depth and investigative reporting (37%), transparency (34%), and comes from an individual who speaks plainly, without an agenda (30%)⁴³.

Top qualities that make news feel worthwhile consuming: By age group (%)		
	Gen Z (1996-2010)	Australians Aged 30+ (1995 and earlier)
Has balanced/unbiased coverage	38%	56%
Covers instant/breaking stories	37%	43%
Offers depth and investigative reporting	37%	46%
Transparent about potential biases	34%	35%
Uses clearly cited sources and evidence	30%	34%
Comes from people who speak plainly and don't have an agenda	30%	31%

Gen Z format preferences.

When it comes to formats, we know that:

1. Almost 1 in 2 prefer to read the news
2. More than 1 in 3 prefer to watch news, more than any other cohort
3. Almost 1 in 5 prefer to listen to news⁴⁴

This diversity in format preference points to a fundamental shift in how news media will need to be produced.

The future is liquid.

Format will matter less than adaptability. "Liquid journalism", enabled by AI, will allow news to shift fluidly – a news article becomes a podcast, or a podcast becomes a video – meeting audiences wherever they want to consume it⁴⁵. This highlights the future disruption for news media formats which is steadily approaching.

39. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 79.
 40. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 120-122.
 41. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 79,127, 61.
 42. ThinkNewsBrands, CrowdDNA, News Perceptions and Consumption Today Research, 23.

43. ThinkNewsBrands, CrowdDNA, News Perceptions and Consumption Today Research, 27.
 44. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 89.
 45. Nic Newman, *Journalism and Technology Trends and Predictions 2026* (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2026), 3.

Journalism in Transition: Case Study

Journalism is critical when the big stories break.

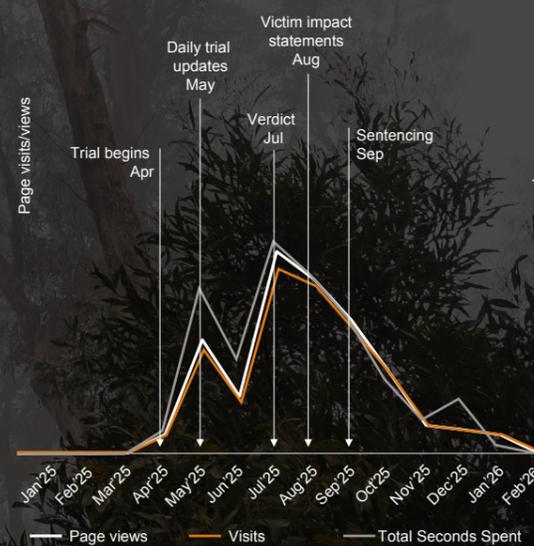
Whether it's crime, current affairs or sporting moments, news media is where Australians turn to get trusted information, greater context and invaluable insider accounts.

News and the 'Mushroom Murders'.

The so-called 'Mushroom Murders', which centred on Erin Patterson's conviction for killing three relatives with a poisonous beef and mushroom wellington, spawned podcasts, documentaries, thousands of column inches, viral social media posts – and was a defining media moment for 2025. Despite this, engagement data shows that when the murder trial began and across the case, people turned to news media.

Engagement data from publishers, including time spent, page views and visits, shows a dramatic increase during the Mushroom Murders court trial. Here, audiences sought verified reporting, credible context, and depth from established news outlets and their newspaper, online, podcast and YouTube video coverage of the trial. People may scroll social platforms for immediacy, but they rely on journalism for details, explanation, and clarity⁴⁶.

Engagement Data: Mushroom Murders



“If you actually wanted to understand what went down that day, you went to the news. Not some random hot take or niche explainer, just straight reporting on what the witnesses were actually saying.”

Female, 23

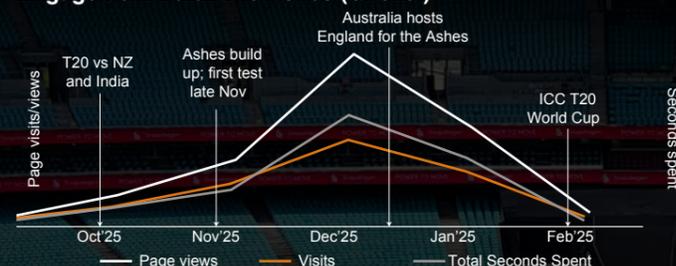
The Ashes.

We see this pattern repeat during pivotal sporting moments, particularly the recent Ashes series. The Ashes is a unique cultural moment in Australia, holding national attention over the summer.

While there's been an exponential rise in sports creator content, news media plays a unique

role for authoritative reporting, expert analysis, and insider perspective. This is backed up by engagement data, where we saw a significant uptick across all engagement metrics, particularly for December and January. In short, news provided a certain level of depth, context and expertise that social platforms were unable to provide⁴⁷.

Engagement Data: The Ashes (Cricket)



“There are heaps of poddies [podcasts] out there, but after a day’s play, the news is actually pretty quick. I know the game fairly well, but you still have a look at what some of the experts [cricket journalists] are saying.”

Male, 32

The Winter Olympics.

Soon to be publicly released data from Nine Publishing reveals that Total Nine Publishing has generated more than 7.3 million page views across Winter Olympic Games Milano Cortina coverage since 4 February. Stories on Milano Cortina 2026 across its metro mastheads are outperforming the 2025 sports average by 53% in total page views.

Engagement data shows:

- > There’s been 7.3 million page views, since the Games began
- > Metro mastheads are attracting 53% more views compared to the 2025 sports average

Whether in moments of national significance or sporting intensity, the behaviour is consistent: for stories that matter, people turn to news media.

47. ThinkNewsBrands, Internal Publisher Data.

Journalism in Transition: Case Study

Why News Literacy Matters

News media literacy, the ability to critically assess news sources, content and credibility, is a critical lever for trust and improving willingness to pay.

Higher trust.

53% of those with news education trust journalism vs those without it (41%). In a climate where there's scepticism and fake news anxiety, this highlights media literacy as a tool to build stronger trust⁴⁸.

Amplifies the value of news.

People with news literacy education are three times more likely to pay for news. This is driven by an appreciation and understanding of the time, effort and various entities involved (eg the journalist, fact checker, editor, etc)⁴⁹.

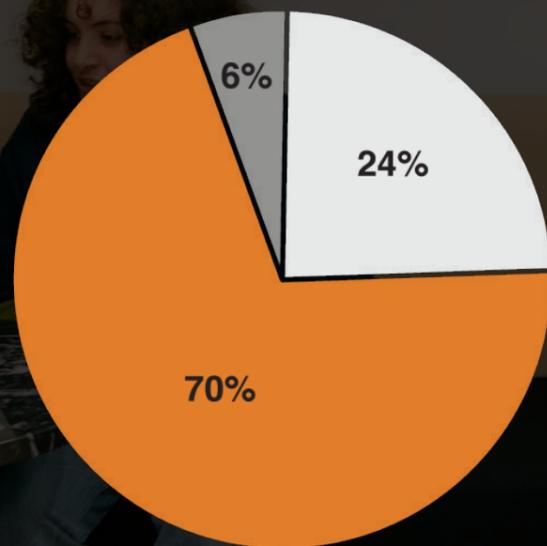
An area to be improved.

70% say they have not had any news literacy training – higher among those 55-64 (82%) and 65+ (93%). Only 24% of Australians have received either a formal or informal training in how to evaluate news, spot misinformation, or understand how journalism works⁵⁰.

News literacy is critical to protect Australian journalism.

People turn to news now more than ever, and ensuring news literacy is essential to boost trust and help people understand the importance of the role of journalism. Already there's such a strong relationship – increasing media literacy will strengthen things further.

News literacy education received



■ Yes, I have ■ No, I have not ■ Don't know

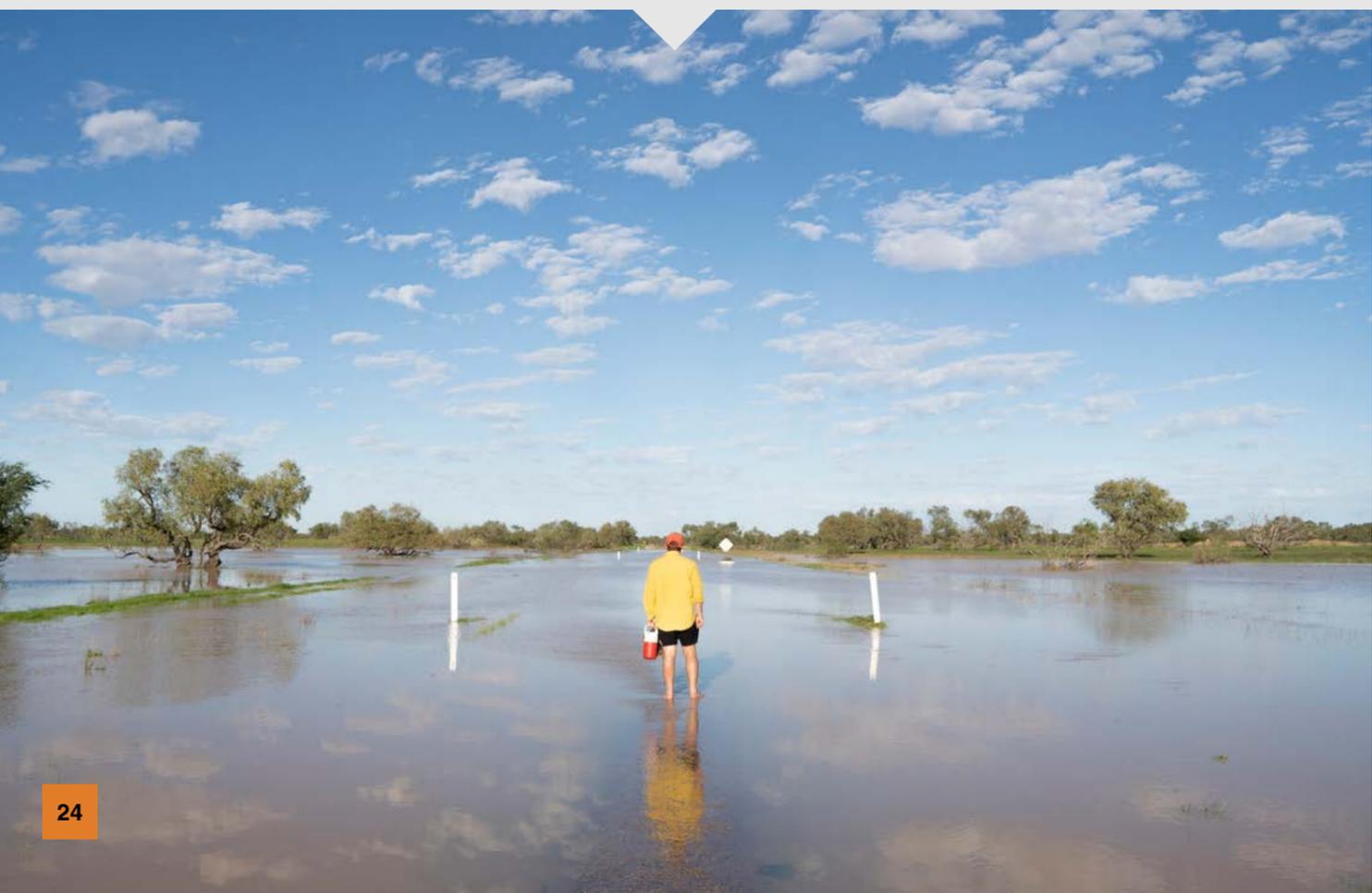
48. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 147.

49. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 147.

50. Park et al., *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*, 89.

Scroll and Slow Down: Journalism's High Engagement

Journalism is one of the few remaining lean-in environments, where people actively engage rather than passively scroll.



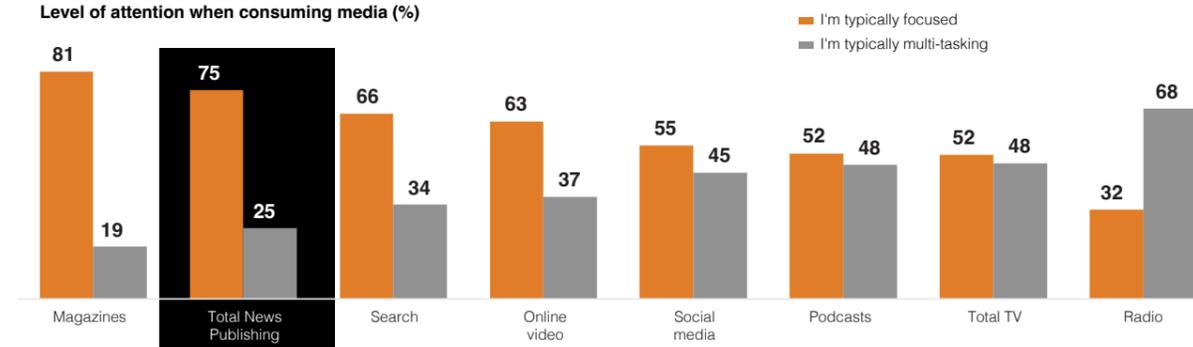
Getting in focus.

News media tunes the world in:

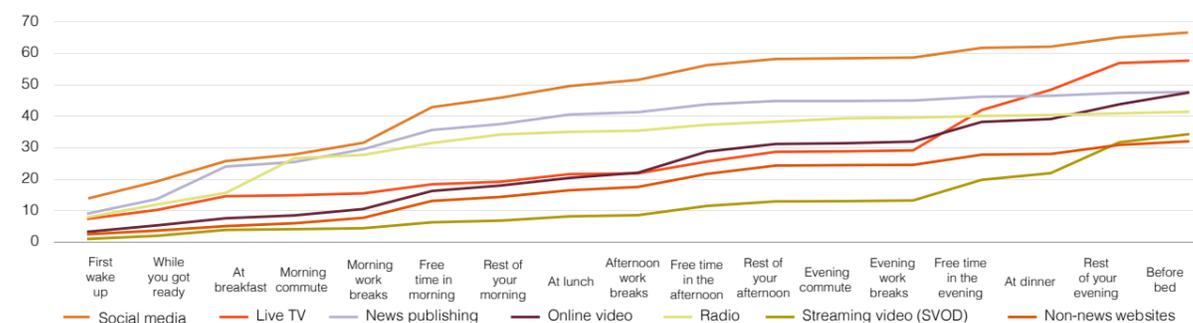
- > More than one in two Australians start their day consuming news media⁵¹
- > By the end of the day, news media outlets have the third highest engagement, behind streaming and social platforms⁵²
- > 3 in 4 see news media as an opportunity to focus on what's in front of them, to slow down, and to limit multitasking⁵³

News media outlets act as a steady presence to be engaged with across the day, while also offering moments to slow down and absorb the facts.

Level of attention when consuming media (%)



Cumulative media usage across the day (%)



51. ThinkNewsBrands, Media Moments Research, 8.
 52. ThinkNewsBrands, Media Moments Research, 9.
 53. ThinkNewsBrands, Media Moments Research, 16.



“There’s always news, and new news. Social platforms can be good because you get the latest, unedited, but it can feel like you easily lose time if you give in.”

Female, 23

Australians are selective and discerning.

People are becoming increasingly discerning with their attention, carefully selecting what to focus on and what to avoid⁵⁴. They’re trying to protect themselves from doomscrolling and the time-wasting trap of social platforms’ endless feed of hot takes and shifting opinions.

54. ThinkNewsBrands, CrowdDNA, News Perceptions and Consumption Today Research, 23.

And yet with news media, they engage regularly.

Rather than putting up boundaries, people choose to read news throughout the day. About 1 in 2 start their day consuming news media, whether via news brands or social platforms. For those accessing journalism through news media websites, engagement builds steadily; by evening it ranks third highest in engagement, behind TV and social platforms⁵⁵.

When people engage with journalism, 75% say they shift to more focused attention – pausing multi-tasking to absorb the facts⁵⁶. News media is a true lean-in environment, behind only magazines and ahead of search, streaming and social platforms.

Our qualitative work shows that news media reduces cognitive overwhelm. Unlike the noise of social platforms – with its conflicting information, overwhelming opinions, and the potential for fake news and time-wasting synthetic slop – journalism offers access to verified facts, further context and a deeper understanding of what’s happening⁵⁷.

In other words, journalism is time well spent - a designated safe zone for attention, which is a rarity in 2026.

55. ThinkNewsBrands, Media Moments Research, 9.

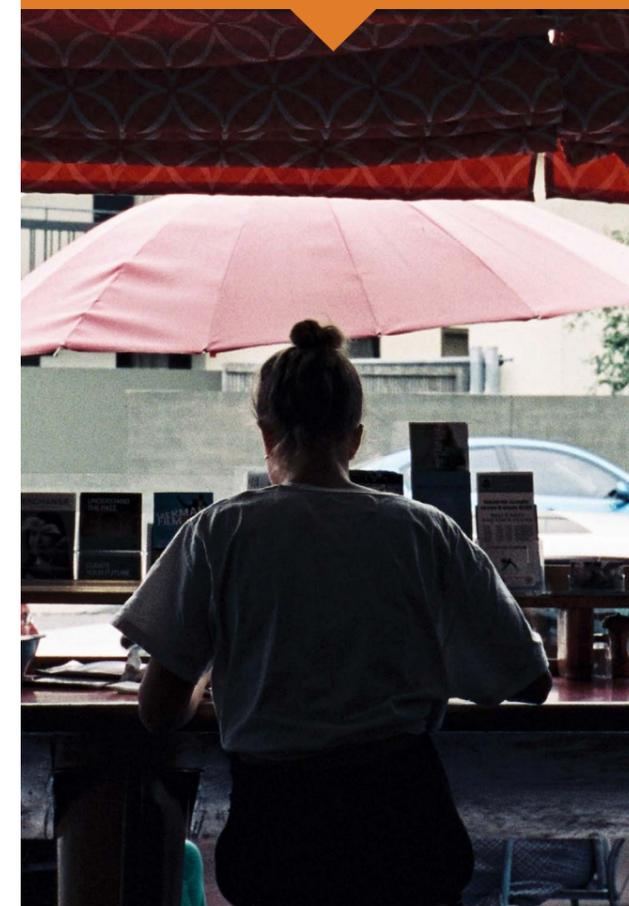
56. ThinkNewsBrands, Media Moments Research, 16.

57. ThinkNewsBrands, CrowdDNA, News Perceptions and Consumption Today Research, 27.



“I have really specific news accounts I follow on social platforms, so I get the news I want with none of the anxiety. The ones I know are good, like the ABC, you make time to hear or read what they’re saying. But others, you just scroll on.”

Male, 27





“I might scroll through on the bus to work, and when you see those [news and journalism sources] you actually stop and take in what they are saying. It might be about a new café in Brunswick, it might be an investigation by the AFR.”

Female, 31

“I’ll look at social media, sure, but when I want to know what’s real, I go to the news. That’s where the facts are.”

Male, 27

Trusted news media environments are high-impact and high-engagement.

Trust changes how people pay attention.

Behavioural science tells us that when information comes from a known and credible source, the brain judges it as low risk and drops scrutiny.

Lowering these cognitive defences results in a mindset that is less vigilant. Instead, people become receptive to the information in front of them – whether it’s a story, advertising or something else altogether. Research in the United States shows that higher levels of attention and more time spent on a page pays a mental dividend, improving recall by 77%⁵⁸.

This reinforces the fact that trusted news media environments are high-impact and high-engagement.

58. Teads and Lumen, *The Value of Traditional News: Why Funding Quality Journalism Isn’t Just Good for Democracy—It’s Good for Business* (2024), 23.

Beyond Reporting: The Social Impact of News Media

Journalism plays a critical role in enabling positive social change in Australia.

In recent years, there have been numerous examples of trusted news brands moving beyond reporting to influence policy outcomes and deliver tangible impacts for everyday Australians. This includes speaking up for endometriosis sufferers, advocating for regional Australia, highlighting the importance of financial literacy, and spotlighting Australia's mental health epidemic.

On the next page are two recent examples which highlight the positive impact of news media when they advocate for everyday Australians.



News Australia

Let Them Be Kids

At a time when teenage lives are increasingly played out in digital spaces, ‘Let Them Be Kids’ highlighted some of the big risks Australian youth are facing on social platforms.

Evidence showed young people encounter harmful content, including graphic violence and extremist material, at significantly higher rates than the general population. It also highlighted the exponential rise in suicide, self-harm, mental health and eating disorders among young people because of social media.

In response, News Australia coordinated an advocacy campaign across its news brands to raise the age of access to social platforms to 16. This campaign was united by a simple message: there needs to be stronger protections for children online, especially on social platforms.

The campaign contributed to a major policy shift for digital safety in Australia, resulting in the introduction of world-first age limits for social media use. Since the laws were introduced, several countries around the world have followed Australia’s lead. It put a spotlight on the risks within social platforms, reinforcing the case for stronger child safety online.

☐☐☐Nine

Stop it at the Start

‘Stop it at the Start’ addressed violence against women by focusing on prevention rather than response.

Based on evidence that harmful attitudes often form during childhood and adolescence, the campaign centred on how adults can influence healthy and respectful relationships through simple conversations.

Using a deliberately disruptive media strategy, messaging was placed at the very start of high reach content. The campaign used Nine Publishing’s trusted, authoritative voice to prompt conversation and serve as a pathway to educational resources on [respect.gov.au](https://www.respect.gov.au). This approach was highly targeted, using consumption data to reach audiences at high attention moments.

This campaign has been instrumental in shifting the dial when it comes to domestic abuse in Australia. It reached 60% of Australians who influence children and contributed to increased awareness of how harmful attitudes form. It also drove a measurable rise in adults initiating conversations about respectful relationships with young Australians.

“Brand safety emerged as a legitimate response to real threats, such as terrorist content on unmoderated platforms. But it has since metastasised into a blunt force system that disproportionality penalises quality journalism. [...] [Brand safety] systems often flag content as “unsafe” based on words like “shoot,” “death” or “feminist”, regardless of the context, which leads to widespread over-blocking.”

Gabriel Dorosz, International News Media Association⁵⁹

Brand Safety Today: The opportunity to educate (and debunk some myths)

The brand safety myth.

One of the big challenges facing news media today is the persistent misperception that news environments are unsafe for brands and pose reputational risk⁶⁰.

This perception stems from brand safety technology, where automated tools scan for trigger words, subsequently blocking ad placements, and flagging content as ‘unsafe’^{61 62}.

While these tools are critical - especially for social platforms where user-generated content is fast, unfiltered and unmoderated - in the case of news media they scan URLs and metadata, latching on to specific keywords without looking at the broader context⁶³.

This results in safe, credible journalism being misunderstood. For example, an article talking about a “pull shot” in cricket has potential to be misread as content related to a mass shooting.

In past year alone, we know this has impacted Australian publishers:

- > Updates on the US election were deemed as ‘terrorist related’, resulting in an estimated 5000 ads being blocked from appearing on high consumption news reporting.
- > Articles on Australian politics and the 2025 election were flagged as too ‘topical and sensitive’, resulting in an estimated 1000 ads being blocked from appearing on high consumption news reporting.
- > News from the United Kingdom, on Prime Minister Kier Starmer’s performance, was classed as a ‘sensitive social issue’, resulting in an estimated 2000 ads being blocked from appearing on high consumption news reporting.
- > While the data is not available at time of publication, it’s likely that news coverage of the 2026 Australian Open, including Carlos Alcaraz’s 25-shot rally with Novak Djokovic, was flagged as high-risk and therefore blocked from advertising. This means missed advertising opportunities in a highly attentive environment.

“The reason we avoid [news] comes down to brand safety. I want to be cautious – imagine a Toyota ad next to a story about drink driving.”

Young Media Buyer, Female, 31

59. Gabriel Dorosz, *How News Advertising Reclaims the Brand Safety Narrative* (International News Media Association, November 2025), 5.

60. CrowdDNA, *Newz Needs*, 35.

61. Dorosz, *How News Advertising Reclaims the Brand Safety Narrative*, 5-8.

62. Paula Felps, *How Media Companies Can Combat News Avoidance* (International News Media Association, February 2025), 5-6.

63. Reach Solutions, *In Safe Hands* (London: Reach Solutions, 2020), 10-12.

Brand safety tools: built for social platforms, not for news media environments.

What's often overlooked is that the original studies underpinning brand safety arguments weren't conducted on news media at all:

- > The 2018–2019 As Brand Safety Playbook was an important study focused on the risk of advertising alongside offensive or hateful content. It never actually examined advertising next to journalism or in a news media context, but rather looked at user-generated content which appears on social platforms⁶⁴.
- > The 2021 TAG/BSI highlighted that 85% of people in the United Kingdom would reduce purchases if advertising was next to Covid-19 conspiracy theories. However, journalism is highly vetted – not a place for such theories⁶⁵.



Brand safety lacks empirical evidence.

There's a significant body of evidence highlighting that advertising in hard news environments – politics, the economy, foreign affairs, conflict – doesn't impact advertising. Negative sentiment doesn't transfer to advertiser brands.

64. Dorosz, *How News Advertising Reclaims the Brand Safety Narrative*, 12-15.
65. Dorosz, *How News Advertising Reclaims the Brand Safety Narrative*, 12-15.

No negative impacts.

In America, research shows that 69% of people report that advertising in disconcerting, hard news environments doesn't affect their perception of the brand⁶⁶.

Brand impact stable.

Looking at advertising next to topics like the Covid-19 pandemic and the the Black Lives Matter movement, and then measuring recall and purchase intent, suggest there's no difference between advertising against hard and soft news⁶⁷.

No difference in brand reputation.

Across a 50,000-person sample, research finds no meaningful difference in brand reputation, favourability or purchase intent between ads placed alongside hard or soft news. Average brand metrics score 67.2% for hard news and 68.3% for soft news, well within expected variation. Advertising next to hard news performs just as well as it does next to lighter content⁶⁸.

The way forward: context, attention and trust.

The future of brand safety lies in prioritising platform trust, audience receptiveness, and a deeper, nuanced understanding of content. It shouldn't be about a specific keyword; it's about where an ad appears and how that environment is perceived. This context shapes meaning and meaning shapes response.

The context of the article and the relationship between publisher and audience is key. When a platform is trusted, audiences are more open, receptive, and confident that regardless of the individual content, the publishers' values align with their own. This confidence creates safety by default, not to mention increasing attention, credibility, and effectiveness.

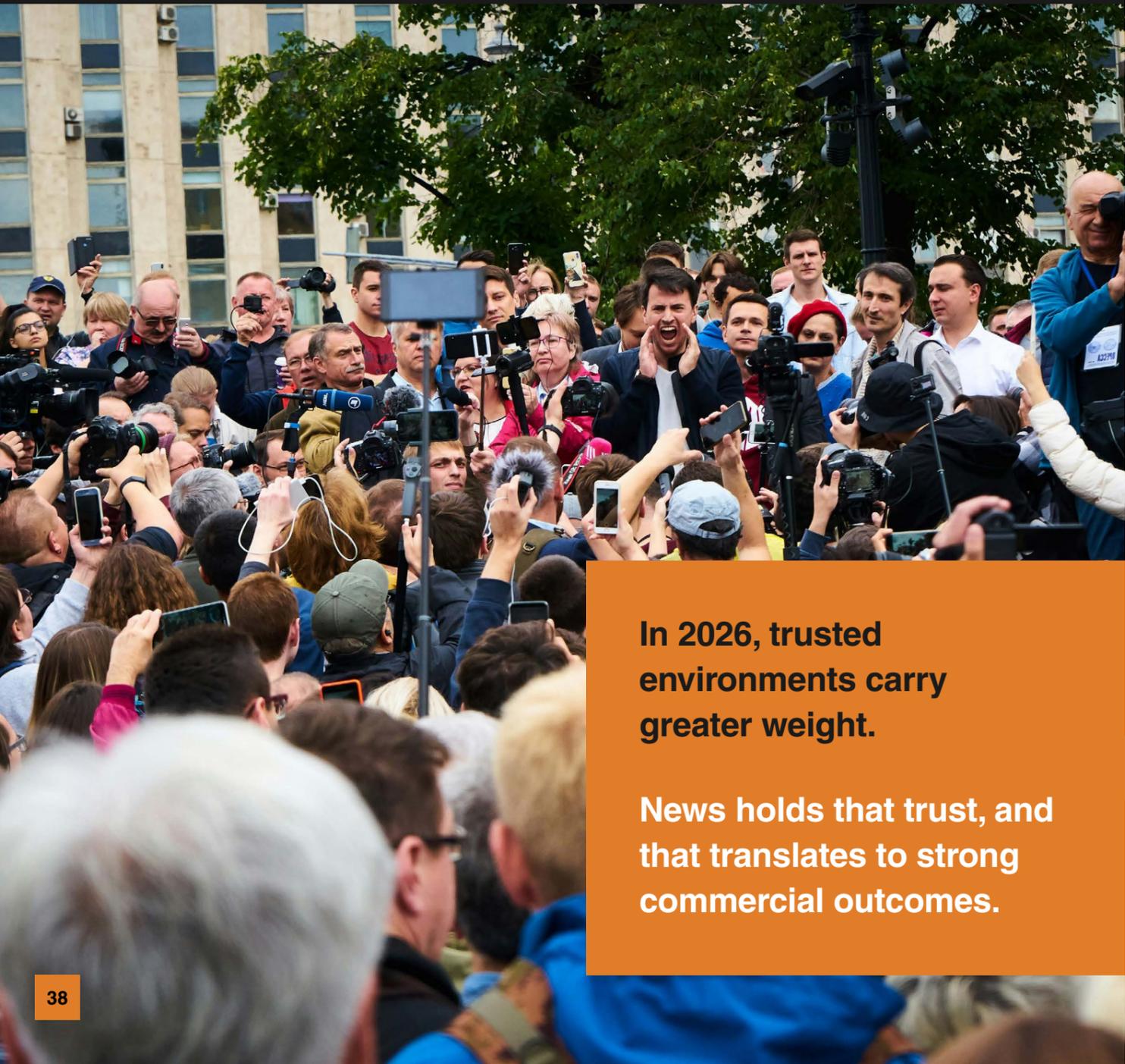
Miscategorisation becomes a big risk when meaning is reduced to a handful of trigger words, not taking into account the editorial setting. In those moments, brand safety tools don't protect value, they erode it, meaning advertisers unnecessarily miss out on high-value, high-engagement placements.

66. Teads and Lumen, *The Value of Traditional News*, 10.

67. Andrey Simonov, Tommaso Valletti, and Andre Veiga, "Attention Spillovers from News to Ads: Evidence from an Eye-Tracking Experiment," *Journal of Marketing Research* (2024): 1.

68. Stagwell, *Future of News* (New York: Stagwell, May 15, 2024), 23; ThinkNewsBrands, *Exposing the 'Brand Suitability' Myth* (Sydney: ThinkNewsBrands, August 2024), 4.

The Case for Investing in News Brands



In 2026, trusted environments carry greater weight.

News holds that trust, and that translates to strong commercial outcomes.

While News Nation’s focus has been examining the role of journalism today, it is equally important to consider the commercial performance of news media as a channel.

In 2026, defined by fragmented information and contested truth, trusted environments carry greater weight. News holds that trust, and that translates to strong commercial outcomes.

This is reflected in the data from Australia and abroad:

- > 85% of Australians report greater confidence in a brand when they encounter it within a news environment⁶⁹
- > Brands advertising in news environments benefit from a measurable mental dividend, with 6.4 times higher brand recall and 3.5 times stronger intent to act compared to non-news contexts⁷⁰.
- > News media delivers an average of \$3.90 for every \$1 invested⁷¹

69. ThinkNewsBrands, *Exposing the 'Brand Suitability' Myth*, 10.

70. Think News Brands, *The Youth Chapter*, 12.

71. ThinkNewsBrands, *Total News for Mighty Sales: Sales Performance with Total News* (Sydney: ThinkNewsBrands, 2023), 4.

Understanding effectiveness: performance built on trust.

News media's strong performance comes down to trust: trust earns attention, with attention driving performance.

While digital inventory on social platforms competes for attention, journalism offers a high-engagement, lean-in environment. After all, this is a space Australians go to as a credible setting, known for having the verified facts.

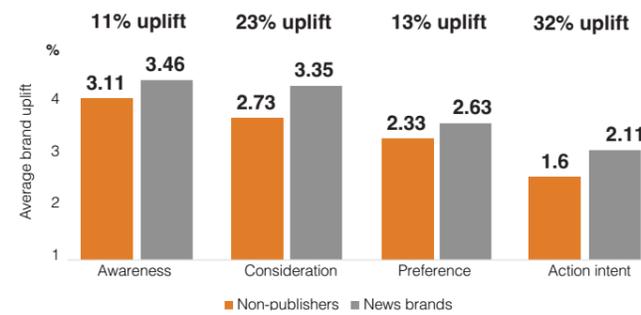
This creates quality attention, where people are not only focussed but trusting and receptive to both editorial content and advertising. Brands benefit from the credibility embedded in the news environment, being met with greater trust, confidence and recall.

Ultimately, this leads to better performance, with the data showing it delivers a return on investment, lifts commercial performance, and influences people's behaviour.

Full funnel effectiveness.

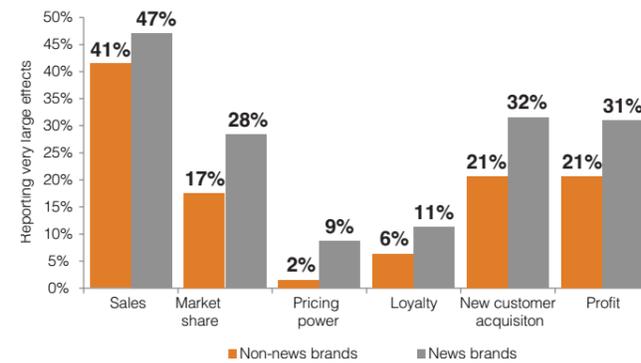
Research from the United Kingdom compared consumer response to brands advertising in news media with those using non-publisher environments. This was a significant study, comparing the 12 national news media sites to the other top 500 sites by volume of impressions across 2023 and 2024 in Lumen's LAMP dataset.

Across the entire purchase funnel, from awareness to action intent, news brands delivered consistently higher uplift⁷².



Improving key business metrics.

The same study showed that advertising placed in news media outperforms non-news environments, particularly for market share, new customer acquisition and profit⁷³.



72. Newsworks, *Attention Presentation 2025* (London: Newsworks, 2025), 16.

73. Newsworks, *Attention Presentation*, 21.



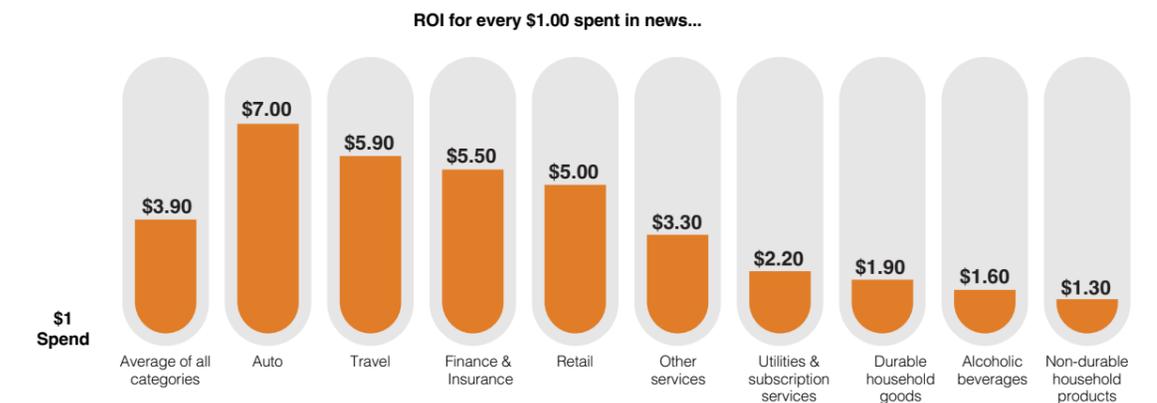
Strong recognition, recall and call to action.

ThinkNewsBrands' own research, which compares attention, recognition and recall in news environments compared to the 'rest of the internet', highlights that news media consistently delivers stronger recognition, recall and uplift in future brand consideration. There's stronger recognition for news media (54% vs 31%), unprompted recall is 6.4 times higher (32% vs 5%), and consideration to act is 3.5 times higher (21% vs 6%)⁷⁴.

News delivers a return on investment.

ThinkNewsBrands' data on projected short-term ROI across media channels shows that news media returns an average of \$3.90 for every \$1 invested.

This is particularly pronounced for categories like auto (\$7), travel (\$5.90), finance (\$5.50), retail (\$5.00) and even utilities and subscriptions (\$2.20)⁷⁵.



74. Think News Brands, *The Youth Chapter*, 12.

75. ThinkNewsBrands, *Total News for Mighty Sales: Sales Performance with Total News*, 4.

Final Reflections News Media Today: Complex, in transition, but essential and enduring.

How Australians consume and disseminate information is fast changing, with new technology platforms enabling almost anyone to share stories. But this should not be mistaken for disengagement in journalism or that news media is undervalued.

News media remains essential to contemporary Australia, and influential in how we understand events, each other, and the world around us.

1. In chaotic times, facts ground us.

The polycrises of today means news media is a critical instrument to make sense of the world and get verified facts.

2. Trust over speed.

News cuts through the messiness of social platforms, providing trustworthy, accountable information. Social platforms might be fast, but they can lack accuracy and credibility.

3. Trust pays a mental dividend.

The trust for news media results in a mental dividend: improved attention, recognition and recall.

4. Trust is the commercial multiplier.

There's a commercial benefit to trust: strong return on investment, better business performance as well as being able to influence behaviour.

5. Blocklists harm brands.

Brand safety is a myth. Keyword tools stop advertisers from accessing high-trust, high-engagement environments. Instead, the future of brand safety lies in prioritising platform trust, audience receptiveness, and a recognition of context.

Methodology

News Nation draws on a robust body of evidence, spanning 19 sources.

Approximately 55% of the reports are from Australia, while the remaining 45% are international, with a particular focus on the United States and the United Kingdom.

Approximately 40% of the total analysis draws on primary research commissioned by ThinkNewsBrands over the past five years, including a previously unreleased study.

A full reference list is provided below. Sources have been cited throughout in order of appearance.

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