

Communications and media in Australia

The digital lives of younger Australians

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Overview

Young people (18- to 34-year-olds)

Often referred to as ‘digital natives’, the 18- to 34-year-old age-group are at the forefront of engaging with the internet across almost all facets of their lives. Young people have spent their formative years online, growing up alongside the internet as it has evolved from the days of dial-up access.

This report provides a snapshot of the attitudes and behaviours of younger people online: the extent and nature of their online habits, what they use to stay connected, and how they feel about the prominence of digital connection in their lives.

The findings paint a portrait of a generation who go online multiple times a day, are quick to adapt to new developments and eager to embrace digital innovation. Particularly strong adopters of mobile technology, young people are connecting to the internet wherever they are and are using an increasing number of platforms and apps to do so. Their reliance on digital technology across many aspects of life also accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic and their online activity increased more considerably than older cohorts. The breadth and depth of their engagement online far surpasses the online behaviours of older groups, who show greater ambivalence about technological change, and often struggle to keep up.

Young people have a level of comfort in online environments, which may not be shared to the same extent by older groups. Their confidence in navigating the digital world is advantageous in many ways, acting as a conduit to socialising, transacting, working and studying, even amid a pandemic. Nonetheless, such deep immersion in the online world also brings with it a range of risks and challenges – from privacy and security concerns to exposure to misinformation and disinformation, scams, online bullying and other harms.

These findings reinforce the significance of safeguards in place to protect internet users across a range of digital environments. In particular, they highlight the importance of ensuring that protective measures move in step with the behaviours of younger people within this highly fluid landscape.

About the research

Unless otherwise stated, this report references ACMA annual consumer surveys collected from 2017 to 2020 by the Social Research Centre (SRC). These quantitative consumer surveys were undertaken to further understand trends in consumer take-up and use of communications and media services.

Data from Roy Morgan Research's [Single Source Survey](#) is also referenced in this report.

See the full methodology for further details about the research design, sample sizes of subgroups and additional notes.

researchacma

The ACMA is undertaking research to:

- > support time-series tracking of patterns of consumer communications and media use
- > inform regulatory development by providing an evidence base on consumer behaviour, and adoption of and attitudes towards media and communications services in Australia.

This research is part of the [ACMA research program](#).







Young people are embracing a rapidly changing digital landscape

Young people see the benefits of digital connection in providing a sense of control over their lives. Confident in online environments, they are not as challenged by new developments in digital technology and are more likely than older groups to invest time in learning more. Despite their positive attitudes, young people remain concerned about risks to their privacy online, potentially reflecting the extent of their engagement in the digital world.

How do young people feel about technology?

Young people are significantly more positive than older people about digital technology, and new developments in this space. They:

	18–34 years	35+ years
 feel that computers and technology give them more control over their lives	60% ▲	44%
 would go out of their way to learn everything they can about technology	44% ▲	30%
 find technology is changing so fast, it's difficult to keep up with it	41% ▼	68%
 are worried about the invasion of their privacy through new technology.	69%	70%

▲▼ Significantly different to the other sub-group at the 95% confidence level.

Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, in the 12 months to June 2020.



Young people use more devices and are online for a wider range of activities

While mobile phones are the most common device used by young people to go online, they are generally using more devices than in previous years, including internet-connected smart devices (like smart TVs, wearable devices and voice-controlled speakers). Compared to those aged 35 and over, young people engage in more internet-based activities, with nearly all going online for communication, entertainment, shopping and banking.

How many types of devices do they use?



Almost **50%** of young people used on average 5 or more types of devices to go online in the 6 months to June 2020, up from **30%** in 2017.

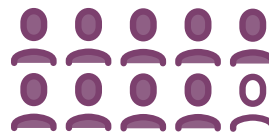
Which devices do they use?

- > Mobile phones are the most common device used by young people¹ to access the internet (97%), followed by laptops (82%) and tablets (51%).
- > Three-quarters (76%) of young people used a smart device², with an average of 1.3 different types of smart devices.

What do young people do online?

Most young people participate in a range of internet-based activities in many aspects of their everyday lives:

Email	99%
Web browsing	99%
Watching video	98%
Accessing news	93%
Banking	92%
Shopping	90%



Over **9 in 10** young people undertake at least one of these activities online

¹ Young people who accessed the internet in the 6 months to June 2020.

² 'Smart devices' include appliances and gadgets which can be connected to the internet, but excludes computers, tablets and mobile phones.



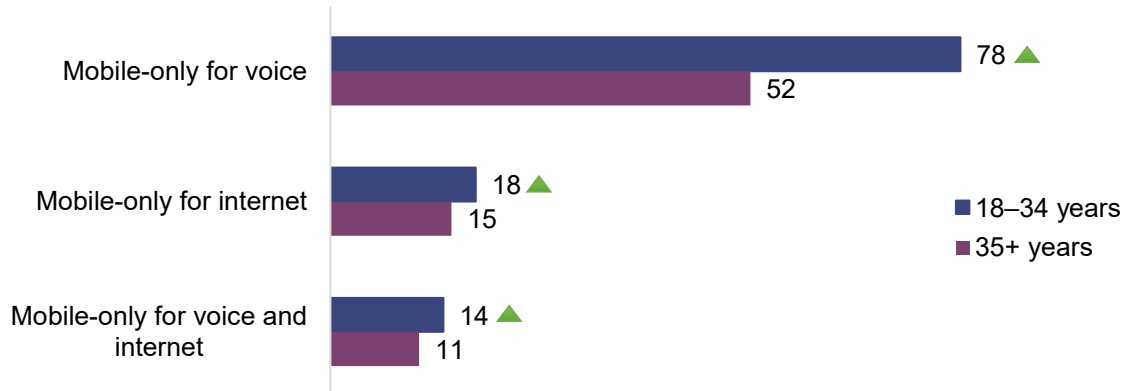
Young people use their mobiles to stay more frequently connected

Young people are strong adopters of mobile technology. They use their smartphones to connect online frequently, rely almost solely on their mobiles to make voice calls and are more likely than others to use mobile-only for internet.

How do young people use their mobiles?

- > More young people have ditched their home landline and fixed-internet connection and have gone mobile-only for voice calls and data.
- > At June 2020, nearly all young people (99%) had a smartphone as their main phone handset and connected to the internet multiple times a day using a mobile phone (95%).
- > Young people are also more likely to rely solely on their mobile phone for personal voice communications. Nearly 4 in 5 (78%) young people were mobile-only for voice calls at home³, up from 59% in 2017.⁴
- > Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) were mobile-only for internet at home (using mobile broadband or a mobile phone).⁵

Going mobile-only (%)



▲ Significantly different to the other sub-group at the 95% confidence level.

Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, in the 12 months to June 2020.

³ 'Mobile-only for voice' are those with a mobile phone and no fixed-line phone at home.

⁴ Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, in the 12 months to June 2020.

⁵ 'Mobile-only for internet' are those who go online at home using mobile broadband or mobile phones. They have no fixed internet connection at home. Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, in the 12 months to June 2020.



Young people are heavy users of apps and platforms

Young people use a variety of apps, and use them more frequently than older groups, including for voice calls, video calls or sending messages. Facebook, YouTube and Instagram remain by far the most common platforms used, while WhatsApp and Snapchat are also relatively popular among this age group.

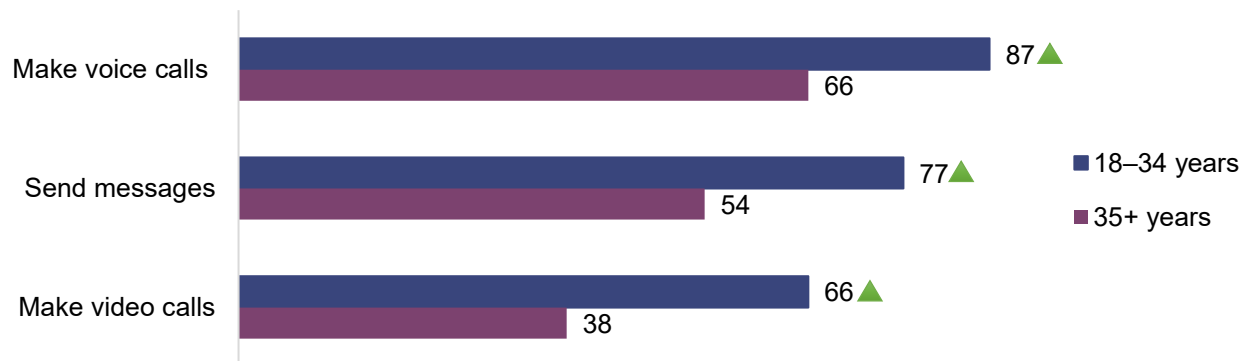
How are young people using apps?⁶

- > More young people are using apps to make voice calls, video calls or to send messages than the rest of the population.
- > Almost twice as many young people used an app for all 3 (to make voice calls, video calls and send messages) than their older cohorts (61% vs 33%).



88% of young people used an app to communicate in the previous 6 months, compared to **72%** of those aged 35+.

Young people used an app in the past 6 months to ... (%)



▲ Significantly different to the other sub-group at the 95% confidence level.

⁶ Internet users aged 18 to 34 in the 6 months to June 2020.

How many social networking sites or apps do they use?

- > Young people are more likely than older groups to use social networking sites or apps, and to use a greater range of them.
- > The overwhelming majority of 18- to 34-year-olds were connected to social networking platforms, with around 85% reporting use of at least one in the previous 6 months at June 2020, compared to 67% for those over 35.
- > Almost two-thirds of young people⁷ used on average 5 or more social networking sites or apps (64% in the previous 6 months), compared to just over one-fifth (22%) of other Australians.

On average:

18–34 years use



5.2 apps

35+ years use



3.4 apps

Top social networking sites or apps used by young people⁸ (%):

91%	83%	81%	55%	55%	31%	26%	26%
Facebook	YouTube	Instagram	WhatsApp	SnapChat	Reddit	TikTok	Twitter

⁷ Those aged 18 to 34 who used an app for social networking in the 6 months to June 2020.

⁸ Those aged 18 to 34 who used an app for social networking in the 6 months to June 2020.



Young people strongly favour online video and audio content

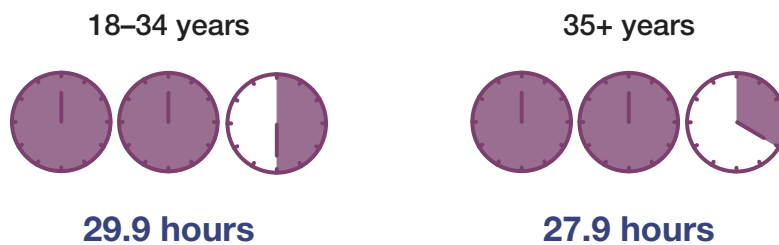
Young people also turn to the internet for entertainment. They are overwhelmingly choosing online subscription services and viewing platforms over traditional TV and are heavy users of music streaming services.

What are the video streaming habits of young people?

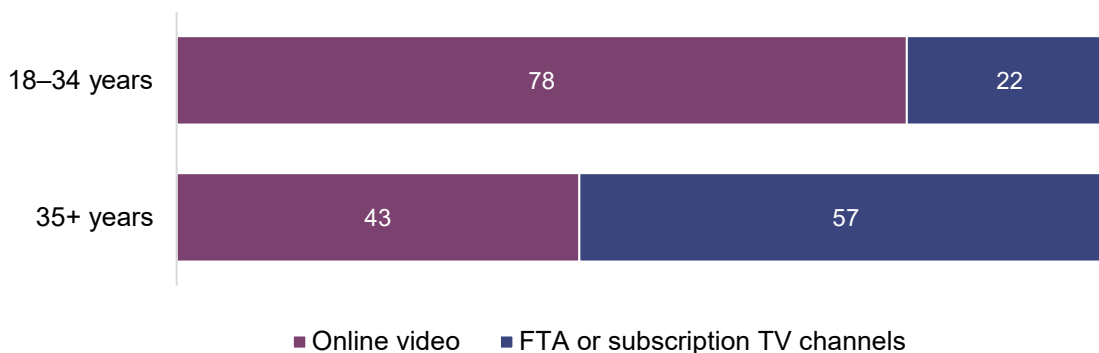
At June 2020:

- > The majority of young people had a subscription or pay-per-view service in their home (81%) and consumed online video content across a variety of platforms.
- > Fewer young people watched free-to-air TV (live or recorded) (45% in the past 7 days) than those aged 35+ (68%). Instead, younger people were more likely to watch content via online platforms such as YouTube (49%), compared with those aged 35+ (36%).
- > While spending a similar amount of time watching video content, younger people were significantly more likely than older groups to spend time viewing online video (78% vs 43% of those aged 35+ years), rather than free-to-air (FTA) or subscription TV channels.

Total time spent viewing online video and FTA or subscription TV channels in a week (average hours)



Time spent viewing online video vs FTA or subscription TV channels⁹ (%)



⁹ Australians who watched any TV or video content in the 7 days to June 2020.

What do young people listen to online?

On average, **young people spend 17 hours per week streaming music**.¹⁰ At June 2020:

- > The majority of young people were streaming music online (88% in the previous 7 days), compared to 51% of those aged 35+.
- > Young people were also more likely to listen to podcasts (32% in the previous 7 days) than those aged 35+ (15%).
- > Only 1 in 6 (16%) young people listened to radio online in the previous 6 months, down from 27% in 2017.

¹⁰ Those aged 18 to 34 who streamed music online in the previous 7 days at June 2020.



Young people's reliance on digital technologies accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic

As for most people, the restrictions brought about during the pandemic led young people to rely more heavily on digital technologies across many aspects of life. Those aged 18 to 34 were more likely than older groups to study online, and to adopt new technologies and platforms over this period.

How have internet activities changed since the start of the pandemic?

Since restrictions related to COVID-19 were introduced in March 2020, participation by young people in online activities increased to a greater extent than for those aged 35 and over.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, young people increased¹¹:



watching video content

more than those aged 35+ (44% vs 36%)



participation in social media

more than those aged 35+ (25% vs 18%)



web browsing

more than those aged 35+ (41% vs 28%)



online shopping

more than those aged 35+ (40% vs 28%)



studying online from home

more than those aged 35+ (51% vs 38%)

¹¹ Internet users aged 18 to 34 in the 6 months to June 2020.