



Foundation for Young Australians

Putting young people in the national conversation: Submission to the Media Diversity Inquiry

Dec 11, 2020

Executive Summary

The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) welcomes the opportunity to make a short submission to the Media Diversity in Australia inquiry, attaching our recent research into media representation of young people in Australia. FYA commends the Australian Parliament for instigating an inquiry following public concern about media diversity, independence and reliability in Australia.

When young people can't see themselves accurately represented in the media, their trust of news and engagement with democratic institutions declines. Media concentration has led to unrepresentative coverage of young people that drives them away, and stymies their ability to critically analyse laws and systems that impact the lives of all Australians.

Key findings from FYA's *Missing: Young People in Australian News Media* report

Media concentration has a negative impact on young people, and on democracy. FYA's recent report, [Missing: Young People in Australian News Media \(Attachment A\)](#) highlights that coverage of young people in Australian news media is limited and often misrepresentative. The report found that negative stereotypes were often used in coverage of young people, most notably by News Corp Australia, who have concentrated ownership of media in Australia. News media is a fundamental part of democracy, but its ability to keep our politicians and systems accountable is limited when a significant part of the community is excluded from the conversation.

By analysing Australian news media over a six month period between February 1 - July 31 2020, our report found:

- Young people made up a **fraction of media coverage** (less than 3.3% of all articles published).
- **Articles about young people decreased** 14% from 2019, despite being disproportionately impacted by a global pandemic.
- In mainstream online media, **young people's voices were excluded from the majority of reporting**, with 59% of headlines that mentioned young people not supported by quotes or case studies from young people in the article.
- **Negative sentiments** about young people as a generation were common. In articles on economic wellbeing for example, 71% of articles that mentioned Generation Z were negative in sentiment, featuring unsubstantiated claims or an absence of quotes or case studies from members of Generation Z.
- Many media outlets use **stereotypes about young people**. The ABC, Australian Financial Review, SBS, The Age, The Australian and The Herald Sun all used at least one of five stereotypes in their coverage of young people. The Australian used stereotypes in 75% of their coverage, and the Herald Sun used stereotypes in 61% of their coverage.¹

FYA's findings are supported by [News and Young Australians 2020](#) (Western Sydney University and Queensland University of Technology) (**Attachment C**) which found that 66% of young Australians believe that news media organisations have no idea what the lives of young people are like. Young people's preferred news sources are increasingly their family or social media, meaning their engagement with news media as a part of democracy is in steady decline. This means young people are often consuming information without the support of established media standards and safeguards that are used to ensure facts are verified and sources attributed correctly. This leads to the spread of misinformation, and increasingly polarised political debates where falsehoods, not facts, are at the centre of public discourse.

¹ Infographic highlighting the key findings has also been attached (**Attachment B**)

Young people have raised their concerns

FYA engaged young people from across Australia to understand how concentrated media ownership impacts their understanding of, and engagement with democracy. Though their experiences were diverse, broadly, young people described feeling that their voices and perspectives were vastly absent from news media in Australia, excluding them from the public debate about key issues in this country.

“Where are the voices of young people and why should we take at face value, the opinions of others if there’s no shared space of constructive conversation? In turn, if young people are not featured in media properly, how do we know the true impact of policy changes, economic recovery models, job creation schemes, or educational opportunities on our society? From what me and my peers have seen, media portrayals of young people are often negative or resort to a blame-and-shame rhetoric. This not only contributes to our generation’s lack of trust in journalism and a proper representative democracy in Australia, but is also detrimental to equitable political decision-making, meaningful social change and broader news integrity and reliability.”

- Ishara Sahama - Age 22, QLD

“The current media systems and ownership in Australia are built upon the values of a handful of Australians. These values don’t represent the diversity and ways of being, thinking and knowing that exist across our multicultural landscape and silence voices and perspectives that are important to the collective narratives we share across Australia. With such power brokerage underpinning the media landscape, we cannot have critical conversations across our democracy that embed the wisdom and leadership of our communities, in particular First Nations communities, who hold knowledge and stories that are central to our collective future. More diverse media ownership would better serve the democratic values our nation seeks to uphold, through greater inclusion of First Nations perspectives into what we see and engage with as democracy.”

Rona Glynn McDonald - Age 24, NT

“Seeing fake news erodes my trust in Government little by little, and questions the effectiveness of Australia’s democratic system. It makes me feel disempowered to engage with traditional news sources. It makes me feel coerced into thought. It makes me anxious having to spend time researching to make sure I can believe the content.”

Anonymous survey respondent

Young people believe there is an urgent need to regulate media ownership in Australia, providing space for more diversity and independence, and in turn, increasing civic engagement and political accountability.

Recommendations

A multifaceted approach is required to remedy the negative effects of media concentration on democracy in Australia and limit the spread of disinformation. FYA’s recommendations will support young people to

participate in the media and keep the media accountable as a fundamental part of democracy.

We surveyed young people on social media about the recommendations they would like to put forward. Their top three selections were:

1. **Consult and include young people as part of the Inquiry into Media Diversity in Australia**
2. **Fund a new, independent fact-checker for political ads on social media**
3. **More funding for an independent, public broadcaster (ABC)**

Consult and include young people in the Media Diversity Inquiry

Young people want to be part of the solutions to the problem of media concentration in Australia. Young people can bring their perspectives and lived experience to the inquiry to help find solutions and ensure that media is performing its function as the fourth estate.

To assist the inquiry, FYA can support young people to give evidence to the inquiry at any upcoming public hearings.

[SYN Media](#) in Melbourne, Victoria, is an example of an independent, youth-led media outlet that is training and supporting young people to understand the role of public interest journalism and the critical role media plays in holding government to account.

"SYN leads as one of Australia's independent youth media platforms, run by, and for young people. We believe young people should be the creators and not just consumers of media. Young Australian perspectives are critical to a transparent and independent media landscape. We know young people are passionate and engaged, they just need the space and tools for them to be heard. Our flagship programs Panorama and Represent are great examples of this, having given opportunities for young people to interview politicians, such as Ros Spence, Jenny Mikakos, Malcolm Turnbull and Adam Bandt. Ensuring that diverse voices are represented on-air, is critical to the future of young Australian perspectives being heard in our democracy."

- SYN General Manager, Evrim Şen and President, Eleanor Doran

Media regulators, such as the Australian Communications and Media Authority and the Australian Press Council, should involve young people in process design and decision-making. This would ensure the regulatory process is inclusive, and will assist these bodies in maximising the social and economic benefits of communication and news for Australia.

The Committee should also consider the following ideas, which were raised by young people as critical to addressing the negative effects of media concentration on democracy:

- **Public education campaigns** to help young people identify and report fake news
- **Research** about what media ownership means for young people and democracy
- A **behind-the-paywall program** that financially supports young people to access content and analysis that sits behind paywalls or subscriptions
- **Streamline and simplify existing media complaint processes**, and
- Build a new, online **click-to-complain website** that sends media complaints direct to the appropriate editor and media regulatory body.

About FYA

[The Foundation for Young Australians \(FYA\)](#) is a national not-for-profit that believes young people have the power to beat injustice and transform the future. We back young people with the trust, resources, skills, and connections to make change. We achieve this through four key areas of work - capacity building, advocacy, strategic projects and co-design.

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