

New study finds Metro Australians are more anxious, stressed and pessimistic compared to Regional Australians, who are happier, more hopeful, content and optimistic.

MONDAY, AUGUST 1, 2022 - ACM has embarked on a new national research study to capture the sentiment of Australians.

In partnership with the University of Canberra, ACM developed Heartbeat of Australia to obtain an in-depth picture of the sentiment of Australians; how they feel, what they've worried about, how they connect to their community and their relationship with local news and advertising.

ACM Managing Director Tony Kendall said, "This new study helps to understand how Australians are feeling and reconfirms our hypothesis that regional Australians are generally happier and more content than those living in capital cities."

"We wanted to explore the key drivers of this disparity between geographic regions and the findings clearly show that feeling connected to your community is intrinsically linked to positive sentiment factors such as happiness and satisfaction with our personal lives," Kendall said.

Kendall went on to say, "We are proud of the role ACM plays in keeping our communities strong, informed and connected and it's reaffirming to see that readers of our trusted local news brands feel more strongly connected and engaged with their community, which has a direct correlation to overall wellbeing."

ACM's Heartbeat of Australia study has discovered significant differences in sentiment, future plans and media consumption across various demographic and geographic segments.

Newly appointed ACM Research Director Alex Mihalovich said, "Metro Australians are more anxious, stressed and pessimistic compared to regional Australians, who are happier, more hopeful, content and optimistic. This trend is more prevalent when we compare younger to older Australians, giving us a powerful insight around the need to support and nurture our next generation."

"Affordable housing and good quality phone and internet connections are the big issues among regional communities, on average 16% and 14% respectively poorer compared to cities," said Mihalovich.

"The Heartbeat study highlights that regional Australians are much more likely to plan domestic travel, buy furniture, home appliances and renovate their homes in the next 12 months," said Mihalovich.

Heartbeat of Australia also sought to identify how news influences communities and how that relationship differs between those consuming state-based and national content versus hyper-local information.

“We found that regional Australians have significantly greater trust in newspapers (64%), compared to residents of the five major capital cities (50%). Localised content is what builds that trust so it’s not surprising to see audiences beyond metropolitan areas with access to such content having a stronger relationship with their news brands,” Mihalovich said.

Heartbeat of Australia shows that those same audiences also want to see more big business supporting their local communities.

For a long time local businesses have advertised directly to regional communities, however this study reveals there is a big opportunity for national brands to do the same in regional areas.

“More than half of the respondents believe big brands place more value on people from capital cities (52%) and as a result are seeing a lack of big brand local advertising, yet 67% value those brands that support their community and 70% prefer advertising that is localised,” Mihalovich said.

ACM Managing Director Tony Kendall said “This is a huge opportunity for national advertisers to not only be more active in talking to the 9.2 million people who live in regional Australia but to ensure they tailor their message to the local audiences to improve relevance and cut through.”

Kendall added, “We’ve always known the ACM suite of mastheads are trusted but this research not only shows that ACM readers trust their masthead 20% more than readers who don’t read ACM titles but it shows the role these mastheads play in the positive well being of our readership. We can see a direct correlation between news consumption of our trusted mastheads, the feeling of being informed and connected and in turn positive well being amongst our readership.”

Professor Sora Park from the University of Canberra said, “The ACM Heartbeat of Australia survey has shown us that access to vital and unbiased information creates a sense of connection and belonging. It’s the glue that binds regional Australians.”

Park also said, “Knowing what’s going on in the local area is one of the most important factors that make people feel connected to the community. This confirms the critical role of local news in people’s lives. We have seen regional areas losing their local newspapers during the pandemic and creating a divide between communities.”

“The work we’ve done with ACM will help local news organisations understand what local news audiences need and how to address them. There is a thirst for localised, quality independent news across Australia, particularly in the regions,” Park said.

ACM Heartbeat of Australia findings will be featured this week in a major editorial program across ACM mastheads but will also help guide the business’s strategic direction for current and future products.

The study will be an annual study designed to provide trends and critical analysis to support regional businesses, consumers and advertisers.

Heartbeat of Australia surveyed 6,367 people online from March to May 2022 across all ages, gender, life stages and geographies. It allows ACM to compare generations of Australians living in regional areas against those in the capital cities with a lens of positive and negative

sentiments, satisfaction with areas of their personal life and issues they are concerned about, future plans, their community and how they connect with news.

Media enquiry: University of Canberra, Media team: Danielle Meddemmen 0408 826 362.

Alex Mihalovich & Sora Park will be available for interview on request, subject to availability.

Bios:

Alex Mihalovich has more than a decade of service design and market research knowledge working for some of Australia's largest and well known industry brands; specialising in data democratisation, product development, customer experience, process improvement, analytical insights and program/project management. Alex works in both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies and has many years experience on the agency supplier and client side of research.

Sora Park is a Professorial Research Fellow at the News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra. Her research focuses on digital media users, media markets and media policy. She has extensive experience in academic and private sector consulting, and is the project leader of the annual *Digital News Report: Australia*, a leading industry study of news audiences. She is the lead investigator of the Australian Research Council Discovery Project '*The rise of mistrust: Digital platforms and trust in news media*', and author of *Digital Capital* (2017).

ACM is Australia's largest independent media company with 140 mastheads across the country. We are passionate about keeping our communities strong, informed and connected. ConnectNow with ACM.

News & Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra is Australia's only research centre specialising in news consumption, social and digital media networks, and the legal, ethical and social impacts of communication technologies. The University of Canberra produces Australia's annual national Digital News Report, which monitors news consumption as part of a global study of 46 countries.

ACM Heartbeat of Australia is a partnership between ACM and the University of Canberra. The study was conducted online by McNair Yellow Squares. The sample was made up of the McNair panel: n=1,066, Unique URL eDM: n=3,491 and Open URL: n=1,810. In field 28 Mar - 6 May 2022. Results weighted by gender. Total respondents = 6,367.



Key findings:

NB: All reference to findings must include “**ACM Heartbeat of Australia, 2022.**”

Headline

- **Regional v Metro Australians:** Anxious (44%/54%), Stressed (59%/42%), Pessimistic (34%/29%), Happy (74%/56%), Hopeful (77%/66%), Content (67%/58%), Optimistic (66%/62%).
- **Younger (<45) v Older (>45) Australians:** Anxious (55%/39%), Stressed (47%/56%), Pessimistic (29%/37%), Happy (66%/76%), Hopeful (66%/72%), Content (59%/70%), Optimistic (63%/67%).

Regional versus Metropolitan

- ‘More people are ‘moving to my community’ (regional 72%/metro 59%)
- ‘My community is a great place to live’ (regional 81%/metro 72%)
- ‘Access to affordable housing’ (regional 15%/metro 31%)
- ‘Quality of mobile phone / internet’ (regional 57%/metro 69%)
- ‘I want to know what is going on in my local area’ (regional 88%/metro 71%)
- ‘Local news helps me feel more connected to my community’ (regional 68%/metro 53%)
- ‘I like to talk to others about local news’ (regional 61%/metro 48%)
- Regional Australians have significantly greater trust in newspapers (64%), compared to residents of the five major capital cities (50%).

Sentiment

- ACM readers have a higher overall life satisfaction (87%) compared to those who do not read local newspapers (71%).
- Young people are particularly ‘concerned and dissatisfied with their financial situation’ (57% aged 18-34 satisfied compared to 87% for 65+).
- ‘Quality of schools’ (88%), ‘employment opportunities’ (91%) and ‘safety on the streets’ (89%) are high influencers of Life Satisfaction.
- Many people (45%) ‘value national brands that support local newspapers with advertising’, however, only a third (37%) ‘see advertising from national brands in their local newspapers’, suggesting a shortfall of big brand advertising in local newspapers.
- Australians (88%) feel that ‘news helps them understand things that might affect them’.
- Eight in ten (84%) agree that ‘news helps them know what is going on in their communities’.

Plans for the next 12 months

- Travel is back on the agenda. 73% of Australians are ‘planning on travelling domestically’ and 29% are ‘planning on travelling overseas’ in the next 12 months.
- Property is also in sight with 13% ‘planning on buying a home or investment property’, and 25% ‘planning renovations’.

Trust in content builds connection

- ACM readers trust local newspapers, 66% compared to non-ACM readers 46% - which is 20% more.
- Trustworthy news is the most important factor when it comes to local news services (62%) followed by 56% who agree that a 'journalists reputation' is critical to quality news.
- Local newspapers are the most trusted source of news (60%), followed by radio (51%) and TV (46%). Social media is the least trusted source of news, with only 13% indicating trust in social media.
- Accessing 'news, information and stories about my community' makes 86% of Australians feel more connected to their local communities.
- The vast majority (70%) of print reader's state that 'news helps them feel connected to the community' (v 51% all other readers).

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