

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 12.01AM THURSDAY 20TH JULY**

## **ACM STUDY FINDS LOCAL NEWS DRIVES POSITIVE SENTIMENT, CONNECTING COMMUNITIES AMIDST TOUGH ECONOMIC CONDITIONS.**

THURSDAY, JULY 20, 2023 - The second ACM Heartbeat of Australia study has reconfirmed the importance of a healthy news diet in fostering community connection and positive wellbeing.

In partnership with the University of Canberra, the study of more than 6,000 people was designed to track the sentiment of Australians; how they feel, their concerns, how they connect to their community and their relationship with local news and advertising.

“Right now the number one issue of concern for Australians is the cost of living (75%) and we’re seeing this more so in the under 45s (79%),” said ACM Research Director Alex Mihalovich.

“The initial study in 2022 found that both physical and mental health were major concerns coming off the back of the pandemic but as we learn to live with Covid-19 and we’re faced with new challenges, our financial concerns have increased, directly as a result of our current economic situation,” said Mihalovich.

“The study shows the cost of living concerns are more prevalent amongst women (79%), those under the age of 45 (79%) and people living in the capital cities (77%). Multiple factors contribute to this including the mental load of women in the household, the lack of savings and superannuation amongst youth and the rising cost of homes in the capital cities,” Mihalovich said.

Mihalovich went on to say, “When the second survey was conducted we’d just been served 10 consecutive rate rises so, unsurprisingly, in addition to the cost of living there is also widespread concern about financial debts, energy costs and housing affordability.”

One of Heatbeat’s key findings is the significant role that credible local news publishers play in keeping communities connected. And that a connected community equates to a more positive and prosperous community.

The study also found that 84% of people believe local and regional news brands cover issues that affect the community well, and 84% agree that it’s done better than national/international news brands.

ACM Managing Director Tony Kendall said, “We take very seriously our mission to support the communities we serve and this study shows that without a regional independent voice our communities have no trusted way of staying connected. Relevant news and information is vital for the sustainability of our regional towns.”

The question of which media is most trusted has long been debated and the Heartbeat research shows there are much higher levels of trust associated with local news brands compared to national news brands. This finding is a direct result of the relevance of the content. When people can immediately relate to content that aligns with their personal values and lifestyle they are much more likely to trust that content. News Media brands that cover large areas don’t have the luxury of changing their message for each regional community, which results in a disconnect between the consumer and the content.

Kendall went on to say, “Local news speaks directly to its audience. Whether it’s talking about local events, the newest cafe in town or the next big housing estate, our audience can instantly identify with

what they are reading and this is where connections are built. A connection that local businesses and national brands should be leveraging.”

“Regional Australians who typically consume more local news than their metro counterparts feel that advertising and information about local businesses is more relevant to them because our advertisers tailor their messages. It’s also a pretty clear message to national brands that when they advertise in local news they should localise their message as much as possible to ensure relevance and, in turn, cut through.” Kendall said.

Trust in local news brands is particularly strong amongst ACM readers (67%, 16 percentage points higher than non-readers), Regional Australians (66%) and those over the age of 45 (67%). Distrust in social media continues to be an area of concern for over half of respondents. “It’s very satisfying for the whole ACM team to know that our mastheads are trusted 16% more than readers of other news sources. Kendall said.

The Heartbeat research also shows a strong link between the consumption of information and levels of community connection. 78% of survey respondents say that knowing what is going on in their community is the key driver of community connection.

“We have again found a direct correlation between those who consume local news and those who have a deeper sense of connection to their community and positive wellbeing and this comes down to the localised content,” Mihalovich said.

“We continue to see a clear connection between local news consumption and connection to the community. This connection has a positive impact on people’s well being and in turn leads to a more active cohort. Whether that be travelling, renovating, buying furniture or home appliances, this cohort has a higher propensity to act and this is amplified even higher amongst ACM readers.”

Life satisfaction is relatively stable with higher scores amongst people living in regional areas (7.4), print readers (7.3) and ACM readers (7.3).

Professor Sora Park from the University of Canberra said, “On every measure Australians over 45 have higher life satisfaction compared to Australians under 45 years. The biggest gaps are in the standard of living (39% over 45 v 20% under 45), personal relationships (42% over 45 v 24% under 45) and less than one in five under 45 feel part of the community (29% over 45 v 16% under 45).”

“The 18% gap in personal relationship satisfaction between younger and older Australians is related to people settling down and starting families later. It’s not like it used to be where you married your first partner, had the white picket fence and two children by the age of 30,” Park said.

“In the 21st century personal relationships are much more complex and priorities are elsewhere in the early years,” said Park.

The rate at which our society is changing makes it challenging to maintain relevant communication messages but by surveying annually ACM Heartbeat of Australia aims to support businesses to create marketing strategies that talk in the right tone with its consumers.

We are inherently social beings that need connection to support our mental and physical health and ultimately propel us forward in life. And that connection is established more so in those who consume local news content. People who agree that news helps them feel connected to their community have a very high life satisfaction rating at 89%.

It’s widely recognised that trusted content is a requirement of a high functioning society so ensuring the longevity of such content is critical. 76% of ACM readers have indicated advertising helps ensure the sustainability of their local newspaper and close to 62% are willing to pay to ensure this.

We found that those who consume local news have a deeper connection to their community, a greater level of positive wellbeing and are better placed to be able to cope with life's challenges. So it's no surprise that the under 45s, who consume less trusted local content than the over 45s, are much more likely to have negative feelings about the future, including 'Loneliness' and 'Stress'. They also feel more 'Pessimistic' and less 'Optimistic' when they think about the future.

Editorial initiatives targeted at under 45s will not only support the health and wellbeing of our youth but the longevity of the news industry.

ACM Heartbeat of Australia's key findings will be shared with the readers of ACM mastheads this week but will also help guide the business's strategic direction for current and future products.

## **ACM Heartbeat of Australia statistics summary:**

### **I consume and therefore I am connected**

89% life satisfaction for people who 'access news' because it helps them feel connected to their community.

86% of local news readers are satisfied with life vs 61% of those who do not access local news.

Shopping locally and supporting local businesses (76%) and knowing what is going on in the community (78%) are important factors connecting people to their communities.

### **Local content increases my life satisfaction**

The life satisfaction index for regional respondents is 7.4 vs 6.4 for metro, 7.3 for print readers vs 7.0 for online and 7.3 for ACM readers vs 6.7 for non ACM readers.

### **Cost of living trumps health concerns**

Cost of living is now the biggest personal concern amongst Australians (75%).

I'm concerned about paying off debt (33% metro v 26% regional, 32% non-ACM readers v 26% ACM readers).

52% of respondents indicated they are concerned about their mental and physical health.

64% of Australians are concerned about housing affordability (67% for under 45s), this has overtaken last year's Public Health concerns post covid.

Largest gaps. Regional v metro concerns: Public Health (58% vs 38%), Crime (51% v 42%), Alcohol/Drugs (44% vs 31%), Climate change (44% vs 39%), Family/Domestic Violence (40% v 31%), Natural Disasters (36% v 24%).

### **The list of concerns for under 45s keeps growing**

Younger Australians are less satisfied with their personal relationships (24% vs 42%), safety (32% vs 48%), their standard of living (20 vs 39), and their achievements (16% vs 27%).

Housing Affordability, 67% is more concerning for those under 45.

79% of under 45s are more likely to be concerned about employment rather than 45+, 70%.

### **Regional Australians focus on their backyard whilst capital city residents look abroad.**

Regional Australians are more likely to travel domestically than metro (63% v 51%), renovate (24% v 10%), buying furniture and home appliances (33% v 26%).

More metro residents intend to travel overseas vs regional (39% v 32%).

### **Localise content to create connection**

I access local news to understand things that may affect me (89%) and to know what is going on in my local area (83%).

79% are interested in stories and information about the local community.

Respondents indicated that local/regional newspapers were better at covering issues that affect their community, 84% (vs 9% national/metro), and promoting and supporting community events, 82% (vs 9% national/metro).

Regional Australians feel advertising is more relevant to them, 66% and informative about businesses in their local area, 68%. They also consider it useful to find out about products and services, 51%.

66% recalled seeing national brand advertising in their newspapers.

Regional newspaper readers are looking more to local businesses, 60% and local governments, 48%, to increase their advertising spend.

### **Leverage the trust credible news brands have gained**

Trust in local newspapers is strong, particularly amongst Print +10pp, ACM readers +16pp, Regional Australians +16pp and over 45 readers +14pp, while distrust in social media is up 2pp.

Local newspapers remain the most trusted source of news (60%), followed by radio (47%) and TV (39%). 37% of local print newspaper readers trust ads relating to the local community compared to local online media consumers, 23%.

Only a small number of people trust news found on search engines (25%) and podcasts (25%).

### **Print is intrinsically linked with trust**

87% of print newspaper readers are satisfied with life vs 61% life satisfaction of those who do not access news.

Print newspaper readers access local news for social/community reasons, such as 'understanding what affects them', 89%, 'feeling connected to their community', 73%, and 'talking to others', 67%, more than people who rely on other sources of news.

ACM Heartbeat of Australia is an annual study designed to provide trends and critical analysis to support regional businesses, consumers and advertisers.

ACM Heartbeat of Australia surveyed 6,316 people online from March to May 2023 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: Elly Mackay 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 market research and service design 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 more than 100 brands across the country. ACM is passionate about keeping 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 Chi2 research. The total sample of 6,316 was made up of 1,000 respondents from the Dynata panel (quoted for younger metro based respondents) and 5,316 ACM readers. Results weighted by age and gender to ABS data. In field 28 March - 6 May 2023.

-ends-