



Australian Government  
Office for Youth

# Effective Communication with Young People



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This report is written and issued by Patrick Shanahan and David Elliott who were engaged by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to conduct an investigation into communicating effectively with young people.

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# **Effective Communication with Young People**

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**Report for:**

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E&S Research Pty Ltd

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## Foreword

The *Effective Communication with Young People* report was commissioned by the Office for Youth in the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The intended audience for this report is primarily Australian Government agencies who are planning communication activities aimed at young people aged between 12 and 24 years.

This report sits alongside the *State of Australia's Young People* and *Investing in Australia's Young People* reports. In combination, these reports demonstrate the Australian Government's commitment to understanding young people's needs and its determination to work with young people.

The *State of Australia's Young People* tells us that there are sound social and economic reasons for governments to invest in lifting outcomes for all young people. *Investing in Australia's Young People* shows how and where the Australian Government is investing in programs and initiatives for and about young people. The *Effective Communication with Young People* report provides guidance on how to make sure that Australian Government initiatives are known, understood and working for young people.

This report is a vital piece of work. It will help governments get better at connecting with young people and designing programs and services that are youth-friendly and youth-focused. Better connection and communication can help young people by making it easier to find information, advice and services if and when they need them.

The Office for Youth would like to thank the authors of the report and all the young people, stakeholders and organisations who contributed to its development.

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## Summary

The Australian Government established the Office for Youth (the Office) in September 2008 in an effort to engage with the young people of Australia. The Office will work with other government agencies to help young people reach their full potential; make effective transitions to adulthood as they continue to learn, start work, make decisions that support a healthy lifestyle, live independently and form families and relationships of their own; and participate in the broader Australian society.

This report is one of a number of resources being produced to help the Australian Government develop its agenda for young people and to support and assist agencies to achieve outcomes for young people. It investigates effective communication methods for young people, particularly in relation to how government can best communicate with them about the challenges and opportunities they face.

## Methodology

The investigation of effective communication methods for young people included three specific phases of research:

- a literature review to provide an update of current thinking regarding communicating with young people (12–24 years) (The findings of this phase are detailed in greater length in a separate volume.)
- 49 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders/experts, representing organisations that communicate with young people
- 36 group discussions and six paired interviews with young people aged 15–30 years, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, representing a range of socioeconomic strata, employed and unemployed, and resident in 11 locations, both urban and rural across Australia (see section 2 of the report).

## Influences on the lives of young people

Stakeholders and young people alike viewed parents as key influences in young people's lives. Although some younger study participants (15–17 years) were somewhat defiant in their attitude toward parental advice, older participants were more likely to accept and appreciate the advice and support of parents. Those in their early twenties viewed parents (particularly mothers) as a 'sounding board' and reference point for help and advice on their problems and concerns. Stakeholders felt that parents underestimated their influence.

Close friends were also singled out as important influences and trusted providers of information and advice. Young people claimed they often turned to friends for advice on personal, emotional or sensitive relationship issues. Young people also needed peer group acceptance.

Teachers, lecturers, employers and workmates also influence the lives of young people. Young people often seek their advice on matters such as choice of education course, career and decisions regarding direction in life.

There was unanimous agreement among stakeholders and across the various subgroups of young people that the media has an influence on the lives of young people. TV dramas that have a 'reality' feel appealed particularly to young girls, and reality programs appeared to be a source of influence.

The media was thought to influence particular aspects of the lives of young people: fashion, body image, food and beverage trends. Allied to these perceived areas was the influence of the rise of the 'culture of celebrity', the emergence of people who are 'famous for being famous'. Stakeholders pointed out that this was reflected in young people's desire to be popular by accumulating 'friends' on social networking sites and uploading clips to YouTube, and to have '15 minutes of fame'.

The internet, and communication technology in general, is an integral part of the lives of most young people. The inherent benefits of convenience, speed, flexibility and mobility afforded by the new technologies are helping shape the culture of young Australians. Most young people embrace this technology with open arms (see sections 4.1 and 5.1).

**Conclusion:** Parents and friends are a key influence on young people in terms of providing guidance and advice on making important personal and career decisions. According to stakeholders, parents seem to underestimate their influence.

Traditional media is also an influence through its role as an entertainment source, and the internet is growing in terms of providing information via blogs, forums and social networking sites. The integral role the internet already has in the lives of young people suggests that it could become a key influence in the future.

## Information and entertainment

Interestingly, most young people were more comfortable about accepting the role of the media as a source of entertainment than as a potential influence on their thinking or decision making. Many, particularly those aged 18–24 years, adopted a defensive attitude towards the possibility of the media being an influence. The media was often portrayed as an untrustworthy and unreliable source for information and was regarded as manipulative and biased in the way it conveys information.

Stakeholders pointed out that most young people are media savvy, alert to the potential influence of the media on their lives and more than capable of applying their own filters on communications directed to them.

Television was not always spontaneously mentioned as a source of information. According to most in the study, it provides some information on what is happening in the world through news reports and current affairs programs. However, despite the increasing use and influence of the internet, television (both free to air and cable TV) still has a role to play, primarily as a source of entertainment rather than information.

Drama, comedy programs, music and sport represent the key interest areas on TV for young people. However, some stakeholders and young people in the study suggested that, with the exception of live sport programs, TV is rapidly becoming outdated. Young males, in particular, want to view sport live. However, live sport programs are no longer the domain of television only, and accessing live programs on the internet and through mobile phones appears to have increasing appeal.

The internet was said to be growing in importance as an information source, a vehicle for social networking, and a provider of entertainment. It was seen as providing an answer to virtually any question asked of it and, for the most part, a convenient, fast and trusted source of information. Google and Wikipedia were the most frequently mentioned internet sites in this regard.

Young people use the internet not only to access information and download music and movies, but also to socialise (social network sites, instant messaging and internet telephony), watch or share videos on YouTube, conduct retail transactions and banking and keep up with current affairs via news sites. However, social networking sites and YouTube dominated most young people's use of the internet. Internet access to entertainment was said to enable young people to watch what they want, when they want, where they want (often in the privacy of their bedrooms).

Young females were more likely than young males to claim readership of magazines. They read them more for entertainment or recreation than as a source of 'hard' information. The print media (newspapers in particular) were spontaneously mentioned as sources of information on employment opportunities, although the internet, through websites such as Seek.com, was becoming more important.

While radio still has a role to play in the lives of young Australians, it is being challenged by new technologies, most notably the iPod. Young people still listen to radio in the morning and some listen to it when travelling. Music, comedy and gossipy chitchat have primary appeal in this medium (see section 5.2).

**Conclusion:** The internet offers young people options for sourcing information and entertainment. Its strength is in the ease with which young people can adapt computer technology to the way they live. The primary role of the internet is as an information source, but it is becoming more important as a vehicle for social networking and for providing entertainment.

More traditional media such as TV, radio and print material still have a role to play in the lives of young Australians. TV in particular is important for live sport broadcasts, news reports and some entertainment elements. Radio also provides young people with a vehicle for music and listening to idle chitchat. However, computer technology in its many forms is increasingly challenging both TV and radio. The increasing importance of computer technology and its rising popularity as a leisure-time activity is reflected in the literature, with new technologies complementing, rather than competing with, traditional media such as TV (ACMA 2007, 2008a; Brandstrategy, 2007).

## Segmentation

Both stakeholders and young people maintained that the population of young people is not homogeneous. The range of different interests, use of a variety of computer technologies and varying degrees of access to services makes the age range 12–24 years even more heterogeneous than it has ever been in the past. The perceived diversity among young people was said to make the need for segmentation when communicating with them even more important. The population of young people was thought to comprise a variety of subgroups and, while some interests, attitudes and behaviours are shared by all young people, there are significant attitudinal and experiential differences as well.

Across the study there was general agreement that although traditional segmentation variables based on demographic factors (e.g. age, gender, education levels etc) were valid discriminators, any segmentation should include consideration of variables such as life stage, attitudes and behaviours. Stakeholders who worked with young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds stressed that communicating with these young people has to be even more carefully implemented. The cultural context has to be addressed and messages formulated accordingly, with different distribution channels considered.

In general, the major subgrouping mentioned was under and over 18 years of age (reaching adulthood at 18, symbolised by legal age to drink, drive and vote). Other frequently nominated age splits, with life stage/lifestyle included:

- 12–14 years—first years in high school, the onset of puberty
- 15–17 years—final years of school, major exams, decisions on future/career
- 18–24 years—establishing career, possible further education.

Some young people in the study spoke of a transition period (18–24 years) between leaving school and gaining employment. This period was taken up with gaining employment or further education, travelling overseas or spending time in part-time employment (and working out what they wanted to do with their lives). Many young people said that it was during this time that they needed advice, support, help and information on what to do with their lives. Many were unaware of what services were available and believed there was a paucity of services at this time (particularly in rural areas). They relied on the internet and friends to find out where to obtain information and advice on planning their lives.

There was no overall agreement on the best channel for communicating to the various subgroups within the population of young people. However, it was generally felt that communicating with those at school through school is still a potentially effective method of reaching young people aged 12–17 years.

Communication mediums generally were thought likely to cut across the various subgroups. In this regard, TV, billboards and the internet were mentioned particularly by the young people in the study. However, the content of the message and, importantly, the way in which it is creatively executed was generally considered a more important issue than the medium chosen (see sections 4.2 and 5.7).

**Conclusion:** The diversity of subgroups within the population of young people indicates that segmentation is still a valid basis for establishing communication with young people. There was a widespread consensus that the use of traditional demographic factors together with consideration of life-stage variables is a relevant approach.

There was an overall belief that to obtain maximum effectiveness, messages needed to be tailored to the specific subgroups. As a result, execution qualities may vary and, therefore, pre-testing of communication directed to young people is desirable.

## Importance of technology

Most young people in the study maintained that they wake up to technology and often use some form of computer technology as the last thing they do before going to sleep. They use technology constantly in their daily lives. Confirming what young people themselves said in the study, stakeholders maintained that advances in technology meant that they could communicate while doing other things. Modern technology gives young people instant contact with their peers. It helps them connect, keep in touch and socialise and it becomes part of their persona.

Young people in the study acknowledged the importance of communicating and of communication technology in their daily lives. Advances in computer technology in recent years have given increased impetus to the perceived importance of communication and had a profound effect on the lives of young people. Most young people claimed to ‘not be able to live without a mobile phone’, and the computer itself plays an integral part in their lives: at school or university, at home and in the workplace. The computer, and specifically the internet, is rapidly becoming the most important communication source, particularly when in a mobile form.

Young people:

- are very aware of ongoing improvements in communication technology, in particular the micronisation of technology
- use some form of technology to communicate on a daily basis
- are increasingly using multi-function devices (e.g. phone/internet) to communicate. The mobile phone is not just a phone anymore; it’s a mobile computer.

Most young people in the study were confident about using technology to communicate on a daily basis. Most had lived their whole lives with communication technology. They embrace it and consider it a fundamental part of their lives. They see themselves as constantly changing and evolving with what they consider to be evolving technology. Multi-tasking and multi-using technology is their modus operandi. It empowers them in virtually all areas of their lives and influences their confidence and self-esteem (see sections 4.3 and 5.4).

Stakeholders in the study also maintained that computer technology is integral to the lives of young people today and with technological advances it would become increasingly important. Most felt that the influence of technology on young people is not a black or white issue and that communicators need to understand the importance of technology to young people, their attitudes to it and their use of it.

Many stakeholders believed young people have a short attention span and are easily and quickly bored. They want instant gratification and results, hence the importance of mobiles, instant messaging sites and social networking sites. Boredom was often mentioned as something that is frequently raised by young people and often a key driver behind the decisions they make, whether it be drinking alcohol, taking drugs, speeding on the roads or their reason for use of SMS and social networking sites.

Allied to these considerations is the way in which young people use technology. Their communication is generally very quick, short, sharp and to the point, hence the popularity of SMS, Twitter, instant messaging etc. However, some stakeholders felt such communication was superficial, rather than deep or emotional. Stakeholders thought (or hoped) that face to face was still the preferred medium for 'genuine' or 'real' communication (see sections 4.3 and 5.4).

**Conclusion:** Virtually all study participants maintained that computer technology is a critical aspect of the way in which young people communicate today. Young people are very much aware of the advances being made in communication technology virtually on a daily basis. Young people embrace wholeheartedly the use of computer technology, in particular the mobile phone, texting and social networking.

Recent research has established the high penetration of the internet and broadband in Australian households (King, 2006). The literature also shows that young people are the early adopters and key influencers of the new communication technology.

Young people have grown up with changing technology and they have adapted intuitively to the changes. Their adoption of communication technology as an integral part of their lives suggests that communicators need to ensure the inclusion of such technology in their communication but, most importantly, use it appropriately (Carroll et al. 2002; King, 2006; Suoranta, 2003).

## Young people and communicating

The subject matter of the communication and the person with whom they wish to communicate dictates the way young people communicate and the technology (if any) they choose to use. For example, they generally:

- discuss important, intimate and personal subjects face to face
- convey quick, impersonal messages through texting, email or a social networking channel
- communicate with their peers both face to face and by using computer technology
- communicate with parents (and other older adults) face to face or by telephone (fixed or mobile)
- communicate in a formal context, face to face, by email, or both (e.g. attend employment interviews and email CVs)
- communicate at work face to face or over the phone (fixed or mobile) (even in this environment some claimed they email or text on occasion).

Most importantly, cost considerations also dictate what form of communication technology young people choose (see sections 5.3 and 5.4).

**Conclusion:** Young people are extremely adept at using technology to communicate with different people in their daily lives. Most pick and choose a specific form of technology according to the nature of the communication and their assessment of the ability of the intended receiver to use the chosen technology. This pragmatic approach is adopted within the context of their ability to pay for their use of the technology.

Computer technology enables young people to maintain considerable flexibility in the way they communicate with, and receive communication from, others.

The literature refers to the notion of 'reverse socialisation', whereby young people may show their parents how to adapt to social change. It appears that young people may lead the way in regard to new technologies and the ways in which they are used (Buckingham and Willett (eds), 2006; Mackay, 2008).

### Face-to-face communication

Communicating on a face-to-face basis is still the main way in which young people communicate with each other and with most people in their daily lives. Face-to-face communication provides an intimacy not matched by technology and was considered particularly important for conversation or dialogue on sensitive, personal and important issues. With face-to-face contact there was thought to be less chance of messages being misunderstood or misinterpreted. Tonal qualities, emphasis and emotion were said to be more easily conveyed face to face through voice and facial or body language.

For many, face-to-face communication is still the most credible and trusted form of communication, primarily because they believe they have a better chance of judging and assessing the reactions of the person they are communicating with (see sections 4.3 and 5.3).

**Conclusion:** Face-to-face communication is preferred because it is the most trusted form of communication. It was seen as the most appropriate method for conveying personal, important or sensitive information. Importantly, face-to-face communication enables young people to more readily see and understand the consequences of their communication.

Recent research confirms that young people look for communication that is genuine and believable. Face-to-face communication is the single most important means used by young people to communicate with each other (Dunn, 2007; National Youth Roundtable, 2004).

### Mobile phones and texting

Mobile phones appeared to be the favourite communication technology for most young participants in the study, particularly as the more sophisticated phones offer multi-function communication capability. Young people feel uncomfortable and lost without a mobile phone. Mobile phones, together with social networking, dominate young people's communication.

For most young people, mobile phones have become almost indispensable and benefit them in a number of ways. Mobile phones:

- enable communication anywhere, anytime, provided there is mobile coverage; Users can be in contact all the time
- are small, convenient, and easy to use
- enable young people to plan and manage their lives 'on the run'; there is less need to plan ahead

- are more than phones; they are also phone books and, depending on the phone and plan, can be linked to the web, email, games, music, information sources, etc
- can be status symbols or fashion items or fashion accessories.

Young people raised a number of disadvantages associated with the use of mobile phones:

- Phone calls can be costly, particularly for those living on a restricted budget.
- Poor coverage is an issue in remote and some rural areas.
- Mobile phones are less suitable for personal or intimate communication than face-to-face contact (e.g. body language can't be read).
- In social settings, using the phone can be considered anti-social.
- Some young users become so involved or preoccupied with their phone that they exclude face-to-face conversation and contact.

Furthermore, a few young people thought mobile phone technology was becoming too complex and moving too fast, particularly with the advent of Smart phones, making the phones more difficult to use (see section 5.5).

Many young people seemed to use their mobiles more for text messaging, or SMS, than for phone conversations because SMS:

- costs less than a phone call; this was of particular importance to young people with prepaid phone plans or limited incomes
- is quick, easy to use, and fun to do
- can be done while involved in another activity (e.g. watching TV, on the internet, hanging out with friends, at the movies, driving a car)
- can be done at times or in situations where conversation might be uncomfortable or inappropriate (e.g. on public transport, at the movies)
- is informal, often spontaneous and ideal for frequent contact (phone calls were seen as more formal than texting)
- is less intimidating than a phone conversation for young people who lack confidence
- can be a means of keeping out of trouble (e.g. young people can let parents know where they are without having to talk to them or answer questions from them)
- releases users from boredom and loneliness and enables them to feel secure by keeping in contact
- can be used to receive 'reminder texts' about appointments (e.g. hairdresser, dentist) or progress reports from service providers (e.g. updates on repairs to laptop)
- is a convenient method for entering competitions from entertainment providers (e.g. MTV).

The disadvantages of using SMS to communicate were seen as follows:

- SMS is less suitable than a mobile phone call for urgent messages that require an immediate response.
- SMS is less suitable for messages of a personal, sensitive or intimate nature than face-to-face conversation.
- Text messages (like emails) can be misinterpreted.

- Certain messages sent by SMS (or email) would not be spoken in a face-to-face situation (this point was made by some young women).
- Unwanted texts can be received from promotion or sales companies (see section 5.5).

Stakeholders recognised the potential for communicating with young people via their mobile phone. They mentioned two issues in this regard: first, it was important to give the young person/receiver the choice to receive messages; and, second, young people would probably want something in return for giving permission to receive messages (e.g. mobile phone credits) (see section 4.4).

Young people's use of SMS to communicate has generated a new language, which is part shortened English and part code. Some young people were concerned about the use of the abbreviated form of English often used when texting, while others accepted it and maintained that shortened words and coded expressions simply facilitate the speed with which they can communicate. Importantly, it meets their needs and helps identify their subculture (see section 5.5).

**Conclusion:** The mobile phone is the most favoured form of communication technology essentially because of its multi-function capacity and its ease of use. Young people feel lost without their mobile phone. Recent research has shown the mobile phone's importance in satisfying the social and leisure needs of young people and reinforcing their group identity (Carroll et al. 2002; News.com.au, 2009; NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009).

The mobile phone has potential as a means of communicating with young people and can be a conduit for linking to online sites. However, care has to be taken in such use, with freedom of choice to receive messages this way a vital consideration.

### Email and social networking sites

**Email:** Use of email was widespread among young people in the study, particularly those over 18 years and those who use a computer as part of their job. Email has replaced letter writing and is used to communicate both formally (as part of a job role or when applying for employment) and informally (when emailing socially to friends). Email's advantages are that it is convenient, fast, instantaneous (particularly when used from a mobile device, such as iPhone) and useful for attaching files and documents.

Email was said to be used for:

- conveying lengthy messages
- dispatching university assignments
- more serious communications (either formal or informal)
- job applications and sending CVs.

Young people recognised some shortcomings of email: it was difficult to convey sentiment and emotion in an email, and irony and sarcasm could be misunderstood or misinterpreted. They also criticised it in relation to receiving unwanted emails and 'spams' (see section 5.6).

**Social networking sites:** Young people across all locations in this study reported spending considerable time on social networking sites and using instant messaging to communicate. They are as confident in their use of social networking sites as their use of all forms of communication technology (see sections 4.4 and 5.6).

The choice of a social network site seemed to depend on what the peer group uses. However, young participants in the study appeared to progress naturally from MySpace (15–17 years) to Facebook (18+ years).

The benefits of social networking sites were seen as:

- providing a convenient means of keeping in contact with friends (both current and past)
- being an ideal method for keeping in contact with friends overseas or when overseas, keeping in contact with family and friends at home; for many, it has replaced the postcard because of its speed and because photographs can be posted on the site
- being suitable for informal social contact and chitchat
- providing an ideal opportunity to meet members of the opposite sex
- relieving boredom
- enabling young people to have an identity or create an identity and to share experiences (like most new communication technology, social networking sites empower young people, give them confidence and raise their self-esteem; this is recognised and acknowledged by them and by stakeholders)
- extending the ways by which young people socialise and providing an opportunity for them to project their personality (see sections 4.4 and 5.6).

The negatives of using social networking sites included the following:

- privacy and security issues
  - hackers and employers gaining access
  - embarrassing photos
  - loss of privacy through ‘tagging’
  - loss of some control
  - concern about privacy rules (while some users were aware of the rules, others were not)
  - claims that one provider was encouraging them to not go ‘private’
- lack of internet access, slow service and/or poor coverage in some rural and more remote locations
- ‘addiction’ to use of the sites by some users
- involvement with the site is sometimes taken ‘too far’ and users say things they would not normally
- loss of personal intimacy
- advertising by some companies and organisations on social networking sites (see section 5.6).

Stakeholders commonly expressed the view that social networking sites give young people a sense of community. They are modern-day ‘hangouts’. According to stakeholders, young people use social networking sites to maintain friendships, to build identity (e.g. explore what music they like, what fashion they like wearing, ideas, political views in an issue-based way) and to help and support each other on personal issues. Social networking reinforces their current social lives and social relationships (see section 4.4).

Chat rooms, forums and YouTube were all mentioned by study participants. These social media were primarily used for entertainment or procuring information. Through these various avenues those with interests, hobbies or a need for information (university, school) can access the opinions of others with similar interests or talk with them. Blogging was also mentioned in a similar fashion. Not all young people felt at ease in engaging through chat rooms or forums.

Internet telephony (e.g. Skype) and video conferencing were mentioned as other ways of communicating over the internet, especially by those with friends or family overseas. Internet telephony services are cheaper than landline or mobile phone services. Video conferencing was seen as more a form of communication for a job or occupation.

Twitter was mentioned by some in the study as the newest form of social networking and had received considerable publicity at the time of the study. In general, study participants were less familiar with the most recent entrant into the social networking arena but were interested in finding out more about it (see sections 4.5 and 5.6).

**Conclusion:** Email and social networking sites as forms of communication both offer the advantages of speed and immediacy. However, social networking sites provide more benefits than email in that they enable young people to share their experiences with friends and build an identity, promote confidence, build self-esteem and empower young people. Social networking sites give young people extra ways of socialising and help them project their personality. The literature also points out that social networking sites have the benefit of satisfying young people's need to be socially acceptable (ACMA, 2008b).

Some stakeholders were concerned about the superficial nature of communication via social networking sites in particular. Similarly, some concern was raised in the literature regarding potential effects on relationships and the brain through overuse of the internet as a means of communication (ABC TV1, 2004; News.com.au, 2009). Research has also shown that parents have concerns about their children's use of the internet and the difficulty they have in controlling internet use (ACMA 2007; ACMA 2008b).

Nonetheless, the reality is that young people have embraced the social-networking concept because it fits into their way of life, and most seem to be alert to the potential negative issues that can arise from its overuse.

## Communication directed to young people

Young people in the study were very much aware that they are often the target for advertising and communication from corporate, commercial groups, governments and non-commercial organisations. They were quick to point out the styles of advertising and communication they do not like and consider to be ineffective in communicating with them. They criticised in particular:

- spruikers who approach them in the street trying to sell them something
- any communication that is patronising, condescending or authoritarian
- any advertising that 'tries to be cool', 'tries to be young', but to them obviously is not
- communication that does not entertain or attempt to involve the young audience
- 'pop-ups', and any advertising intruding onto their internet screen, particularly on their social networking sites.

Advertising that was considered effective for their age group (15–24 years) ranged from fast food advertising (e.g. KFC, Pepsi Max) through service/internet providers (e.g. Vodafone, Virgin, Apple) to advertising for alcoholic beverages (e.g. Bundy, Pure Blonde, alcohol advertising in general) (see sections 4.4 and 5.7).

'Effective' advertising or communication that appealed to them was often characterised as being 'outside the box', 'humorous', 'zany' and, importantly, entertaining, engaging and encouraging participation. Other key ingredients of effective communication mentioned by young study participants included:

- simple, clean, uncluttered advertising
- honest and straightforward in approach
- not patronising, condescending, or authoritarian
- simple language
- brief and to the point
- the use of music as a key element
- colour, strong visuals
- people and situations with whom they can identify (see section 5.7).

Stakeholders who work in the commercial world maintained that it is important to realise that any communication aimed at young people will be competing with a range of messages from a variety of sources for their attention. In order to cut-through the clutter of communication directed to young people advertisers and marketers are trying to go beyond just communicating with young people and trying to engage with them by encouraging them to 'touch' and 'feel' the brand; in other words, 'experience' the brand. Accordingly, the internet can play a significant role in experiential opportunities. However, stakeholders debated whether experiential marketing and engagement works. Nonetheless, it could be important to enable young people to experience the brand and what it offers.

Some stakeholders also suggested that in attempting to get young people to experience a brand you need to be where they are, such as at festivals like the Big Day Out; others said that festivals are ineffective for most brands and causes. According to most stakeholders, the product or cause has to fit the festival, otherwise it is out of place and therefore lacks relevance (see section 4.4).

**Conclusion:** Young people realise that they are targets for a considerable amount of commercial and non-commercial communication. Breaking through the clutter focuses on using effective message content and engaging in creative execution. Communicators regarded as successful in their approach had found effective and meaningful creative triggers. Pre-testing of creative approaches, both the content and the execution of the communication, is vital.

## Government and young people

### Awareness and relevance

Most young people in the study were largely ignorant of the processes of government and displayed little interest in government. There was a vague awareness of three levels of government (federal, state, and local) with the level of understanding increasing with age and level of education. Overall, the young people who took part in the study had a poor knowledge of government. Stakeholders also perceived that young people knew little about government (see section 4.5).

The federal government had the highest profile among study participants. This was in part because participants associated it with what were perceived to be important and major issues (e.g. the economy, foreign affairs) and the recognition of Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister and the linking of his position with the federal government. Although there was strong awareness of Kevin Rudd as the current prime minister, there was not a great deal of knowledge about him or the Government's policies. (There was, however, strong awareness of the announcement, at the time of the study, of the Government's stimulus package).

While more serious issues were associated with the responsibility of the federal government, there was little knowledge of individual departments and government services. In general, the young study participants tended to think of issues rather than government departments and their relevant responsibilities. The exception tended to be for those who had been directly involved with a particular government department or agency (see section 6).

Importantly, mention of the term 'government' often elicited comments about politicians. Politicians were closely and strongly linked to any discussion about government. However, this was invariably an unfavourable association; most young participants in the study had a strong negative view of politicians. A variety of derogatory terms were used in reference to politicians, and many perceived them as 'old men' who argued abusively with each other.

As a result of the image young people had of politicians, they doubted the integrity, sincerity and truthfulness of most politicians. The Westminster system of parliamentary democracy was often criticised for encouraging those in government and those in opposition to be overly critical of each other. Other perceptions were that politicians from different parties often failed to reach consensus on major issues, and were more interested in attacking each other than in working together for the good of the Australian community. (This opinion may not be restricted to young people; however, young people consider that the absence of 'young' representation in parliament and the small number of politicians who attempt to openly relate to young people mean that parliamentary and governmental processes in general have little relevance for them) (see section 6.2).

Most young people in the study believed the Government was largely irrelevant to their lives at this stage. Most did not think about government. Some pointed out that government would become more relevant to them when they were older and had settled down with a family, when they would be more likely to need government support or knowledge about the process of government.

Indeed, young people considered government to be more relevant to their parents and older people in general. Some said they deferred to their parents when issues to do with government (including elections) arose. They believed that government and government policies generally focused on families, the elderly or disadvantaged segments of the community and were not interested in young people.

Government was said to be relevant when laws and rules passed or established by parliament affected the lives or lifestyles (in particular the social life) of young people. For most in the study, the relevance of government centred on:

- employment
- education (HECS debt)
- limited financial help to students
- alcopops tax, licensing hours and laws pertaining to the serving of alcohol
- cigarette smoking in public places
- internet filtering (primarily for secondary school students)
- passport requirements
- driving licences (rules and regulations)
- transport issues (inadequate transport facilities).

**Conclusion:** Knowledge of government was generally poor except among those who had an interest in it or who were studying law or politics at university. Most young people took little interest in government at federal, state or local level. The federal government had the highest profile due to an awareness of the Prime Minister and an association of serious issues with it. Those who had experienced some involvement with government departments and agencies were better informed of the processes involved and the value of government and what it can offer.

Young people tended to associate government with politicians. The association tended to be unfavourable, because most young participants hold a negative view of politicians. This negativity seems to have come about through media reports, their own perceptions of the behaviour of politicians and the influence of the opinions of others (including their parents).

Surprisingly, some maintained that they had not been taught enough about government, its role, its processes and its relevance to the community. They had not retained knowledge gained from school excursions to Parliament House, perhaps because it was irrelevant at the time or not effectively conveyed.

The literature also makes reference to young people's apathy towards government and their cynical attitudes to it (Bell, Vromen and Collin, 2008; Bennett, 2003; Cassell et al. 2006; Youniss et al. 2002). It suggests that they become more interested in politics and electoral processes when government has more relevance to their lives.

## Government communication

Young people tend to initially react as one to all communication from government. They generally describe it as boring, uninviting and information heavy. However, young people in the study indicated that they differentiate between three aspects of government communication (see section 6.4):

- First, advertising associated with elections and the gaining of office. They made no distinction between political party advertising and government advertising; for example, the 'Kevin '07' advertising campaign was sometimes referred to as government advertising.
- Second, social issues advertising, particularly that perceived to be aimed at young people (e.g. binge drinking, drugs, road safety).
- Third, communication which specifically contains 'hard' information (e.g. wage/salary scales, tax levels, HECS, flu information etc).

Young people in the study reacted to electioneering in much the same way as they reacted to politicians—nearly always negatively. They perceived electioneering as adversarial, reflecting their view of politicians and the system of government in general.

Despite varying opinions on the effectiveness or meaningfulness of government communication, most government 'issues' communication, including that directed to young people, was considered to be serious or important. Issues like road safety, health and welfare, violence and illicit drug abuse were regarded as serious issues and often said to be communicated with high and memorable impact. When discussing government communication aimed at young people, some study participants mentioned communication about the Australian Defence Force and Defence Force recruiting, which they considered to be interesting and engaging.

Communication by government on social issues was generally regarded as credible, even when the communication was disliked or considered irrelevant, or when the content or message of the communication was resisted or found to be too confronting.

**Conclusion:** Young people differentiated between forms of government communication in terms of electioneering advertising, social issues advertising and ‘essential’ informational messages. Social issues and informational communication was generally regarded as serious and important irrespective of a liking or a disliking of its content.

Young people considered that much of government communication directed to them focused on what not to do. The emphasis was perceived to be on negative communication rather than on positive, aspirational messages.

### Engaging with government

Throughout most of the group discussions, young people expressed a great deal of scepticism about whether government was interested in them or whether it simply wanted to be seen to be interested.

Young people’s scepticism about both government’s interest in them and its relevance to their lives resulted in them having little interest in engaging with government on any level. Some contended that if there was an issue they considered directly affected them or that genuinely interested them, they might want to have their say. However, others doubted that government would be interested in what they had to say (see section 6.5).

Allied to these views was the often expressed opinion that they doubted government would reply to any communication they sent to it and that any reply it sent would be either complex or generic.

Stakeholders generally thought young people may engage with government on issues of high personal importance if there was some personal reward and they could be convinced that engagement would make a difference. Some believed they would engage or communicate with government regarding their own health and welfare if given the right opportunity, although they were unsure about what would be the right opportunity (see section 4.5).

Stakeholders suggested that when government tries to engage with young people, it faces additional difficulties to those inherent in communicating with young people generally:

- It is not ‘cool’ for young people to communicate and engage with government and it is unlikely it will ever be cool.
- Government, as a ‘brand’, will always struggle because one arm or department is likely to be doing something that is very ‘un-youth’ or ‘uncool’.
- Young people can’t see the connection between government process and issues.
- Government is, by nature, parent-like.
- Developing and implementing government communications involves a slow and unwieldy process (see section 4.5).

**Conclusion:** There was little interest shown in the prospect of engaging with government due primarily to the perceived irrelevance of it to their lives and the accompanying belief that it would not reply to any request made of it. In essence, young people believe government is not interested in young people and, in turn, they are not interested in government.

There are a number of barriers to involvement in addition to the underlying barrier that young people are not disposed toward engagement. The two barriers of most concern are that young people do not strongly relate specific issues to government and they believe that government processes are too slow.

The literature also points out that engaging young people with government is a difficult process. While on the one hand young people are apathetic towards, disengaged from and cynical about government and traditional politics, on the other they are attracted to apolitical and community-related activities (Eureka Strategic Research, 2006; Zeldin, Camino and Calvert, 2007).

## Methods of communicating with government

When considering how they would communicate with government if they wanted to, some young people in the study were unsure where to start; others put forward the following suggestions:

- google a government website relating to the issue of concern
- establish who is the local member and make contact
- ask friends or parents for advice on how to make contact
- join a protest group or a group associated with the issue/concern
- google the department and seek out contact directions
- use government forums for young people to make their views known.

Some said that government should take the initiative and indirectly make contact with them (i.e. provide a website or contact procedure).

When thinking about how government could contact them, most young people in the study considered some form of technology would be mandatory.

Most young people were very familiar with websites and many were aware of various government websites already (notably Centrelink). Government websites in general were thought to be 'boring' and some were thought to be confusing and difficult to navigate, but overall there was a mixed reaction to them (see section 6.5).

The use of a dedicated government website to communicate with young people was frequently mentioned by those who took part in the study. However, most did not want it to be like current government department sites. Even though it was assumed that most content would be serious, they wanted the site to be more in tune with commercial websites designed for young people.

They thought it should be:

- interactive
- regularly updated
- colourful, bright
- easy to navigate

- friendly and inviting
- helpful and informative.

Their concerns about a dedicated website included:

- only 'certain' people would use it
- it could be bombarded with abuse
- government would not reply to their concerns or genuinely take note of their input
- negative views would not be acknowledged
- it would be too easy to delete an email or comment (see section 6.5).

Stakeholders also concluded that a designated website for young people could be a means of communicating with them, but stressed that it would need to be effectively implemented and offer young people some form of entertainment or personal gain (see section 4.5).

A few young people suggested that government could enter a social networking site. However, there was a great deal of criticism of commercial organisations entering MySpace and Facebook web pages. The thought of government entering a social networking site was even more disconcerting for many in the study. In keeping with the views expressed by stakeholders, most young people felt that their existing social networking sites were for their private and personal use (see section 6.5).

A few young study participants believed that a more confrontational approach to communicating would be the most effective. 'Old style' protest marches or 'sit-ins' were referred to in this regard. For these people some form of disruption to everyday life was the only way of guaranteeing a response from government or at least generating an awareness of an issue. Allied to this was the suggestion that government should come out to the people and see conditions for themselves. This was a particular request from those in rural areas.

There was a mixed reaction to the notion of forums for communicating the views of young people to government. As a concept it seemed a 'reasonable approach' and those most in favour were keen to be part of it. However, many felt that they may lack confidence in such a perceived public arena and showed a preference for more one-on-one contact.

Stakeholders made mention of commercial and government agencies that had effectively communicated with young people through a third party. In other words, they had developed a partnership with organisations that already had a meaningful relationship with young people (see section 4.6).

**Conclusion:** Comments from both the stakeholders interviewed and the young people themselves indicated that youth is a time for seeking freedom, abandon, risk taking and experimenting. Communication from and with government was thought likely to involve boundaries, rules and regulations being placed on their behaviour. Government was associated with ‘don’t’, not ‘do’.

Reactions to current government agency websites suggest that they are not making the most of existing technology. They were often described as confusing, difficult to navigate and lacking the interactive appeal of commercial websites.

The proposition for government to enter existing social networking sites held little appeal to study participants; in fact, the proposition elicited a strong negative response from a significant number of stakeholders and young people. There was, however, some support for a designated site, with the Victorian Government’s youthcentral website appearing to be an effective model in this regard.

Using a third party to channel government communication through was seen as a potentially effective method of overcoming many of the barriers and negative feelings associated with government communicating directly with young people.

## Communication expectations

### Young people

Study participants were consistent in their comments about what they expected from government communication directed to them. Content and message were often regarded as more important than the source or medium used.

Young people felt strongly that:

- Content and messages should be relevant. The issue or topic needs to be one that young people can relate to or that concerns them. The issue needs to be framed in such a way as to make its relevance to them clear.
- The audience should be involved in developing communication either through research or directly. What do they think? How do they relate?
- The communication should not lie or overly exaggerate a situation/issue.
- Messages should be brief and genuine.
- The communication’s language should be simple.
- Content needs to be engaging, involving and entertaining.
- The communication should use only people and situations that young people can identify with.
- Communication should encourage interaction.

The tone and style of communication relates to and is dependent on the issue being communicated. However, as a general rule it was suggested that every effort should be made to:

- avoid being monotonous and boring
- get to the point quickly, don’t ‘beat around the bush’
- not be patronising or condescending

- treat the audience with respect
- be positive (don't always focus on the negatives)
- use music and strong colourful visuals when possible (see section 6.6).

## Stakeholders

Stakeholders put forward a number of 'do's' and 'don'ts' that they felt were relevant to communicating with young people. There was considerable agreement among all stakeholders on most of the suggestions put forward (see section 4.6).

**Listen to young people:** Many stressed the importance of listening to young people and viewed listening as a fundamental part of communicating. In this regard they mentioned formal research approaches and forums; in other words, young people should be given opportunities to make their views known about what they want more or less of.

**Understand your audience:** Given the increasing complexity of the young target audience, stakeholders emphasised that it was critically important to make efforts to understand the target audience—their needs, attitudes and behaviours—before developing messages aimed at them. The diversity of the young audience makes this virtually a mandatory requirement. Formative developmental research on attitudes, behaviours, issues, interests etc was frequently suggested by stakeholders.

**Encourage participation:** It was said that young people now expected to be consulted about and participate in developing communication directed to them.

**Content:** Stakeholders suggested that content creators should first establish an understanding of the target audience's attitudes and the context for the communication. They suggested the following approaches to creating content:

- **Be brief:** Young people appreciate a straightforward, brief and to-the-point message.
- **Send positive, aspirational messages:** Much government communication with young people is negative in nature and tone. Many would respond more favourably to the use of positive approaches in communication.
- **Check tone:** Allied to the preference for more positive messages was the suggestion to check the tone of the communication. Tonal qualities can influence target audience reactions.
- **Check language:** Part of pre-testing is the requirement to check on audience understanding and appropriateness of the language used.
- **Make images relevant:** Young people react well to relevant visual images.
- **Establish what's in it for young people:** Communication has to quickly establish that it is for young people and that it has something for them.
- **Create a strong/conversation approach:** Government communication with young people was a good idea provided it was genuine.
- **Be honest and respectful:** Young people can 'smell a fake'.
- **Empower the audience:** It is important to empower young people through the use of technology and to encourage their ownership of the communication or issue.
- **Aim to have an impact:** Stakeholders maintained communication to young people has to have an impact but does not necessarily have to 'shock'. This can be obtained through 'humour', 'zaniness', 'visuals', 'music', 'dialogue' or a combination of elements.

- **Don't be patronising, judgmental or dictatorial:** In keeping with the suggestion of providing young people with the opportunity to participate in developing communication messages and approaches was the suggestion that the tone of communication should not be authoritarian and the approach should not be judgmental in any way.
- **Don't exaggerate:** Young people are very aware of communication content that exaggerates an issue, circumstance or situation that young people find themselves in.
- **Don't be what you're not:** Young people don't want communicators to pretend to be someone that they're not.

**Endorsement:** Stakeholders suggested that when appropriate and chosen well, endorsement is very powerful, provided it is an appropriate fit with the issue and is believable. The key is to find the right peer leaders or spokespeople and genuinely engage them.

Some stakeholders who had used singers and bands to promote social issue messages claimed to have met with considerable success. They spoke of a 'collective endorsement' model where groups of musicians, often representing a variety of music genres, are brought together to promote a social issue. This approach was said to empower young people through their acceptance of the music and the artists chosen. Care has to be taken in the choice of musicians and in establishing their commitment to the issue.

**Use of a third party:** Use of a third party as an element in communicating with young people has been found in the commercial world to be an effective component in the communication process. So too, in government communication, stakeholders indicated that government messages, when sent through (or with help of) another party are more meaningful and ultimately more effective. Developing partnerships with organisations that already have a relationship with young people overcomes negative associations with government involvement.

Research detailed in the literature review for this study supported many of the suggestions made by the young people and stakeholders interviewed in regard to communicating with young people (Donovan, 1991; Geraci et al. 2000; McCrindle Research, 2008; Peattie, 2007; Shanahan, Elliott and Dahlgren, 2000).

**Conclusion:** Communicating with young people in any way involves a number of key elements:

- understanding the audience
  - listen to them and hear what they say
  - establish attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, motivations
  - define problems
  - identify issues
  - establish objectives, target audiences, potential themes/messages
- segmenting the audience
  - define audience into more specific categories
  - specifically consider young people from Indigenous backgrounds and Language Other Than English (LOTE) backgrounds when relevant
  - consider the issue /topic and the sensitivity of the audience to it
  - establish relevant sub-groups
  - prioritise target audiences
- developing message/communication content
  - take note of the do's and don'ts
  - develop according to issues and existing attitudes
  - establish what the audience will do with your message
- choosing appropriate communication mediums
  - depends on segment, issue, message
  - consider specific medium or combination media
  - carefully examine media usage
  - if internet, consider pros/cons.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The Australian Government established the Office for Youth (the Office) in September 2008 to signify its desire to engage with the young people of Australia. The Government recognises the importance of young people as a distinct population group and values their input into discussion on how government can work more effectively.

The Office will work with other government agencies to enable young people to reach their full potential; make effective transitions to adulthood as they continue to learn, start work, make decisions that support a healthy lifestyle, live independently and form families and relationships; and participate in the broader Australian society.

The Office was founded on the understanding that the Government:

- recognises the importance young people have to Australian life
- understands the diversity of young people's life circumstances
- acknowledges the challenges and opportunities that are unique to this generation (Australian Government Office for Youth, 2008).

Guiding principles established for the Office include:

- **Universality:** The acknowledgement that all young people are important and all deserve to do well. Government policies and services will be such that all young people, irrespective of their varying life circumstances, will be supported.
- **Engagement:** As a way of showing that the Office respects and understands the value of contributions young people can make as citizens of today, the Government will engage with young people.
- **Inclusion:** The Government is addressing, through its productivity and social inclusion agenda, the broad gap in achievement between young people doing well and those disadvantaged and socially excluded. The Office will support the Government's agenda by supporting and encouraging all young people to do well, including those facing particular disadvantage, such as some Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander people, those who are homeless and those with mental health issues.

The Office will establish a deposit of baseline data to support and assist agencies to achieve outcomes for young people. Three resources to assist the Government as it develops its agenda for young people will be produced:

- First, an investment in Australia's young people through capturing policies and programs that are either specifically for young people or that have an impact on young people. This will help establish the resources available and expose potential gaps—and, therefore, areas that need attention.
- Second, a report on the state of Australia's young people to establish how young people are going and which segments need further support.
- Third, an investigation of effective communication methods for young people, in relation to how best to communicate with them about the challenges and opportunities they face.

This report concerns itself with the third resource: an investigation of effective communication methods for young people. Benefits of the investigation will be:

- to deepen understanding and improve communication effectiveness; understanding the intended audience is the basis for improving communication

- to assist and enable other agencies to better communicate with young people, particularly in regard to imparting new information and using new technologies
- to consolidate information and improve efficiency by providing a central coordinating source of information; by so doing, the Office will save the Government time and money.

## 1.2 Overall aims

The aims of this research project were to:

- inform, complement and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of government communications with young people
- develop and deepen the evidence base for communicating with the current generation
- coordinate, centralise and add to existing government expertise
- understand young people's needs and expectations across government.

The project gathered and examined a mix of quantitative data, qualitative research and expert opinion. Consequently, it investigated three primary dimensions of effective communication:

- **segmentation** to provide a description of the diversity within the 12–24 year age group and a framework for government to tailor and refine communication to maximise impact
- **engagement** to provide a set of guidelines to maximise the impact of government communication
- **special audiences** to provide information to address disadvantage among young people and support the Australian Government's aspiration for all young people to do well.

The project had two distinct elements:

- first, to investigate ways government can communicate effectively with young people
- second, to present the findings in formats that make the information accessible and useful to intended Australian Government agencies.

## 1.3 Specific aims

The first element was addressed by a number of research phases:

- first, a literature review to provide an update of current thinking on communicating with young people. The outcomes of this stage helped guide the subsequent research phases.
- second, an examination of stakeholder views on communicating with young people. Interviews were conducted with a diverse range of people representing organisations that communicate with young people.
- third, research with young people themselves to examine how they communicate and their opinions on communication with them.

The aim of conducting research among young people was to explore and determine their views on communication methods and to find out whether their communication needs differed according to age, gender, geography and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The research was also conducted to determine their attitudes to government and their perceptions of its credibility as a message source.

To this end, this phase of the study examined questions such as:

- Who are young people? How can they be grouped? Demographically? Attitudinally? Behaviourally?
- What groupings or segments are relevant to effective communication?
- Do young people see themselves as one homogeneous group to be communicated with in one way? If not, should young people be targeted according to their subgroup?
- If there are subgroups, what are the best channels of communication for each of the subgroups, and which have the most crossover?
- Can young people living in rural, regional and remote Australia be regarded as one segment or do multiple segments exist? If the latter, what are these segments? Are there special sub-audiences—cross-cultural (e.g. rural Indigenous, rural culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, young people with disability)—within non-urban young people?
- Do different young people have different communication needs (e.g. rural vs urban)?
- In what ways do young people communicate with themselves, parents and other (non-peer) adults, and with government and other public authorities or groups?
- What are young people influenced by?
- What factors are important in communicating with young people?
- Are there any differences in terms of age of young people, gender, education, residential location etc?
- Do young people in rural areas react differently to communication?
- Do the communication needs of young people living in rural, regional and remote Australia differ from those of young people living in the cities?
  - If they differ, how do they differ?
  - What additional strategies are required to ensure effective communication?
  - Are the channels of communication the same or different?
  - Is access to the internet an issue for this target group, (e.g. reliance of satellite, reliability of satellite and/or lack of broadband)?
- Is the culture of young people living in rural, regional and remote Australia sufficiently different from those of young people living in the cities that different materials or mediums for communication are required? That is, do cultural or attitudinal differences exist which therefore demand different engagement strategies?
- What is the role of technology in meeting the communication needs of young people?
- What is their use of, and access to, new and emerging information technology? For instance, do young people's attitudes to new technology make a difference to how they use or accept the messages?
- What are the preferred online and mobile technologies that young people use to participate in civic and political activities to influence government decision making and policy development?
- Are young people more likely to participate as consumers, creators or networkers when they use online and mobile technologies to participate in civic and political activities?
- In what other ways do young people use these technologies to actively participate in their communities (including geographic communities and communities of interest)?

- Are young people aware of government communications in general? Are they aware of government communications directed to them? What do young people think of government communications aimed at them?
- How do young people view the impact, seriousness and relevance of government communications? How credible do they think government communications are?
- Do young people think differently in regard to the subject matter of government communications? The tone of the communication (e.g. personal vs informational)? According to the agency involved? According to the medium used?
- Does music, fashion, lifestyle and psychological profile influence the way young people view government messages?
- What are the expectations of young people using government websites, particularly in regard to how young people expect government to respond to issues they raise online?
- Do young people living in rural, regional and remote Australia bring a different perspective to government communications (e.g. more or less trusting; see issues differently)?
- Do young people see Australian Government departments as separate agencies, or is it better to have one general 'Australian Government' approach?
- What information do young people want from government and how do they want to receive it?
- How can government best communicate with young people? What issues and messages are important? What is the best vehicle for these messages? Do messages (and vehicles) vary according to type of group?
- Do young people want the Australian Government to communicate 'on their level' or would they prefer a corporate, high-level, information-based approach?

While those questions guided the research process, study participants were encouraged to raise the issues and aspects of communication that they felt were important. The study was very much participant directed.

## References

Australian Government Office for Youth, December 2008, Research Brief: 'Effective Communication with Young People', p. 3.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Stage 1: Literature review

The literature review provided an update of current thinking on communicating with young people (12–24 years), with an emphasis on 15–24-year-olds. The outcomes of the review were used as the context for and a guide to subsequent phases of the research. This phase consisted of a literature review of current Australian and overseas thinking on communicating with young people.

### 2.2 Stage 2: Stakeholder/expert interviews

This stage comprised input from Australian stakeholders/experts, including those who work directly with young people, as well as policy makers, educationalists, academics, advertisers and those working in the media. The stakeholders interviewed were chosen from lists supplied by the Office for Youth together with suggestions put forward from Elliott & Shanahan Research. Interviews were conducted both face to face and by telephone with representatives from youth marketing, social marketing, mainstream youth and from those who work with young people from LOTE and Indigenous backgrounds.

### 2.3 Stage 3: Research among young people

The Office for Youth requested that the research include analysis of the methods of communication young people consider to be effective. This stage of research explored differences in communication needs according to age, gender, geography and culturally and linguistically diverse background. As well, it examined young people's attitudes to government and their perceptions of its credibility as a message source.

#### 2.3.1 Scope and structure of the research

##### Stakeholder interviews

In total, 49 interviews were conducted with stakeholders, of which 32 were administered face to face and 17 over the telephone. A list of organisations included is appended. They covered the following industry and organisational areas:

- government (16)
- rural (8)
- non-government organisations (7)
- culturally and linguistically diverse background and Indigenous backgrounds (6)
- advertising/marketing (5)
- academic/research (4)
- music/events (3).

## Group structure

The group structure and composition was devised to cover young Australians (15–24 years) in general and two special audiences (rural young people and Indigenous young people). Overall this stage of the study comprised:

- **36 groups**
  - 18 full groups
  - 18 mini groups
- **6 paired interviews** with young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. (These supplemented those involved in the group discussions.)

Groups by gender and age	Male	Female	Total
15–17 years	5	5	10
18–21 years	4	5	9
18–21 years (unemployed)	1	1	2
22–24 years	6	4	10
22–24 years (unemployed)	1	1	2
22/25–30 years (rural)	2	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>36</b>

The study was conducted over 11 locations, as shown in the following table.

Groups and paired interviews by location	
Sydney	8 groups and 3 paired interviews
Melbourne	4 groups and 3 paired interviews
Brisbane	4 groups
Perth	6 groups
Coffs Harbour (NSW)	3 groups
Condobolin (NSW)	3 groups
Toowoomba (Qld)	2 groups
Northam (WA)	2 groups
Nambour (Qld)	2 groups
Palmerston (NT)	1 group
Wagga Wagga (NSW)	1 group
<b>Total</b>	<b>36 groups and 6 paired interviews</b>

Outline of groups	Male	Female	Total
Young people in urban areas	2 x 15–17 years	3 x 15–17 years	5
	2 x 18–21 years	2 x 18–21 years	4
	3 x 22–24 years	2 x 22–24 years	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>
Young people in rural areas	2 x 15–17 years (mini)	1 x 15–17 years (mini)	3
	1 x 18–21 years (mini)	1 x 18–21 years (mini)	2
	1 x 22–24 years	1 x 22–24 years	2
	1 x 22–30 years (mini)	-	1
	1 x 25–30 years (mini)	1 x 25–30 years (mini)	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>
Unemployed young people	1 x 18–21 years (mini)	1 x 18–21 years (mini)	2
	1 x 22–24 years (mini)	1 x 22–24 years (mini)	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>
Indigenous young people	1 x 15–17 years (mini)	1 x 15–17 years (mini)	2
	1 x 18–21 years (mini)	2 x 18–21 years (mini)	3
	2 x 22–24 years (mini)	1 x 22–24 years (mini)	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>

Urban young people (8 groups, 6 paired interviews)		
	Male	Female
Sydney	1 x 15–17 years	1 x 18–21 years
	1 x 18–21 years	1 x 18–21 years Asian paired interview
	1 x 18–21 years Indian/Pakistani/ Sri Lankan paired interview	1 x 22–24 years
	1 x 22–24 years	1 x 22–24 years (unemployed) (mini)
	1 x 22–24 years Middle Eastern paired interview	–
Melbourne	1 x 15–17 years Asian paired interview	1 x 15–17 years
	1 x 18–21 years	1 x 15–17 years Middle Eastern paired interview
	–	1 x 18–21 years (unemployed) (mini)
	1 x 22–24 years	1 x 22–24 years Indian/Pakistani/ Sri Lankan paired interview
Brisbane	1 x 15–17 years	1 x 15–17 years
	1 x 22–24 years (unemployed) (mini)	1 x 22–24 years
Perth	–	1 x 15–17 years
	1 x 18–21 years	1 x 18–21 years
	1 x 22–24 years	–

Groups contained a cross-section of young people from a range of socioeconomic strata and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (see section 2.5). Mini groups contained five or six people and full groups seven or eight people.

### Rural and regional young people

One of the special audiences for the research was young people from rural and regional areas of Australia. A total of 10 groups were allocated for these young Australians, covering the age range 15–30 years.

The approach was based on our experience in research with young people and with those in rural locations, accordingly:

- part-affinity mini group and full group discussions were used (see section 2.5)
- genders were separated (see section 2.5)
- age splits are in accordance with the overall study structure (see section 2.5)
- the locations chosen represented a coastal region (Coffs Harbour in NSW), an inland region (Toowoomba in Qld) and two rural areas (Northam in WA and Condobolin in NSW).

### Rural young people (10 groups)

	Male	Female
Coffs Harbour (NSW)	1 x 15–17 years	–
	1 x 22–24 years	1 x 25–30 years (mini)
Toowoomba (Qld)	1 x 18–21 years (unemployed) (mini)	1 x 22–24 years
Northam (WA)	1 x 25–30 years (mini)	1 x 15–17 years (mini)
Condobolin (NSW)	1 x 15–17 years	–
	1 x 22–30 years	1 x 18–21 years

### Indigenous young people

A particular focus on the communication needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples helped in determining whether any differences exist in terms of effective communication, and what channels, messages and principles are most likely to be effective. An essential requirement of any research process involving Indigenous Australians was that it be sensitive to the needs of the respondents in regard to the way information is imparted and collected. Of paramount importance were issues of consent and participation, which were addressed through a variety of protocols and procedures for this research. These principles underpin the work carried out by Origin Communications.

All participants involved in this research did so voluntarily and were remunerated for their time and involvement. A number of Indigenous organisations assisted considerably with localised recruitment, provision of appropriate venues and, in some instances, transport for participants. Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

A total of eight mini discussion groups were conducted across five research sites, including a mixture of two urban capital cities (Perth and Sydney) and three regional centres (Wagga Wagga [NSW], Palmerston [NT] and Nambour [Qld]). Locations were selected to provide a spectrum of Indigenous communities across Australia. The participants in these discussion groups were drawn from the general Indigenous community with no specific recruitment criteria other than being Indigenous, currently living in the local area and complying with the age group.

Discussion groups were conducted according to location (urban/regional); gender (male/female); and age (15–17-year-olds, 18–21-year-olds and 22–24-year-olds). The table below shows the number and structure of the groups across the research sites.

Location	Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups						
	Male 15–17	Male 18–21	Male 22–24	Female 15–17	Female 18–21	Female 22–24	Total
Sydney	–	1	–	1	–	–	2
Perth	–	–	1	–	1	–	2
Wagga Wagga (NSW)	1	–	–	–	–	–	1
Palmerston (NT)	1	–	–	–	–	1	2
Nambour (Qld)	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>

### 2.3.2 Discussion and interview procedure

**Mainstream and rural groups:** Each discussion and interview was semi-structured to enable as broad a coverage of the topic as possible, while providing an informal environment in which participants could raise the issues they believed to be important. Interviews and discussion guides were developed in consultation with the Office. Each discussion and interview commenced with a general consideration of communicating. In some of the groups the young people were asked to bring along to the discussions examples of communication they believed to be effective and meaningful for themselves and their peers. This provided a stimulus for further discussion.

Elliott & Shanahan Research believes that in qualitative research experienced staff are important, particularly in terms of moderating and analysing. They actively observe, hypothesise, falsify and verify, based on their skill with the procedures and techniques. The moderator's or interviewer's role is to ensure that there is coverage of all relevant issues, and where points are not raised spontaneously to put them forward for consideration. Participants are encouraged to raise the issue most salient to them, and discuss them in their own terms of reference.

Group discussions and interviews were conducted by the Elliott & Shanahan Research team, specifically Patrick Shanahan, David Elliott, Barry Elliott and Maggie Wilkins. Discussions and interviews took place between March and April 2009.

**Indigenous groups:** Elliott & Shanahan Research works in collaboration with Origin Communications, one of Australia's most respected consultancy agencies specialising in Indigenous communications and consultation. The Origin team, which comprises Indigenous Australians and other team members with extensive experience working with Indigenous people, has a comprehensive understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural, community and organisational sensitivities. Origin's guiding principles determine the way it works in respecting and validating diverse cultures and their local protocols, and include:

- commitment to the use of culturally appropriate, respectful consultation, facilitation and accurate reporting mechanisms
- provision of open, transparent processes, impartial policy analysis and advice, and application of a holistic approach that integrates client needs, organisational core values and existing resources
- commitment to privacy and confidentiality of information, and to ensuring that knowledge gained during the project de-identifies individual sources, as appropriate.

The Indigenous group discussions were facilitated by Indigenous researchers with varying levels of local intermediary support (particularly in the recruitment phase). The team of researchers consisted of a mix of female and male personnel. Non-Indigenous staff also provided support for researchers, through coordination and logistics for the project. All researchers were highly experienced in working with

Indigenous Australians, and non-Indigenous staff had extensive and current expertise in working with Indigenous people.

All discussions were conducted by local Indigenous researchers from Origin Communications at local community organisation venues. Comments were made and shared within the group. According to protocol, all qualitative data were de-identified and recorded for each group only, not per individual participant.

## 2.4 Recruitment

The recruitment procedures employed for the mainstream and rural group discussions were IQCA (Interviewer Quality Control Australia) or ISO 20252 (Q+A Research, West Coast Field Services, Mary Sweeney & Associates, FS Research Services) accredited and adhered to the guidelines detailed by the MRSA (Market Research Society of Australia). All participants in the group discussions and paired interviews were recruited through companies that have IQCA or ISO 20252 accreditation.

Recruitment procedures for the Indigenous component of this project included a combination of:

- recruitment via selected community organisations
- localised support for recruitment (flyers, sign-on sheets, word of mouth)
- local on-site recruitment by researchers
- special topic recruitment through local networks and specialist agencies.

To be eligible for the Indigenous research all participants were:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- local residents, not visitors to the area
- within the age group and of the gender required for the discussion group.

## 2.5 Rationale

The research approach proposed was developed in line with the following rationale:

**Research techniques:** Qualitative research techniques were applied because they enabled a more thorough investigation of the topic. Also, rational as well as emotional considerations were able to be covered.

Part-affinity groups were suggested with groups containing two or three people who know each other. In the past we have found this to be a more effective approach than inviting a group of total strangers. People are more comfortable when they have a friend with them and it tends to encourage more honest responses.

A combination of full groups and mini groups was suggested. Such an approach would make it easier to evaluate responses from community segments for whom evaluation can be difficult. This approach would make youth subgroups more accessible and it would have the advantage of affording wider coverage. The proposed structure also provided for the inclusion of young people from a range of family structures.

**Gender and age:** Groups were deliberately segmented by gender and age. It is our experience that a more honest response is obtained when this is done. Moreover, it may be likely that males and females will display different attitudes and behaviours on the issue. As well, the age categories selected enabled us to examine how life circumstances and varying lifestyles impact on attitudes, experiences and behaviours in regard to communication. The emphasis was on 15–24-year-olds (as agreed in discussions with the Office); however, the views of 12–14-year-olds were gathered through the literature review, stakeholder interviews, and through recall of earlier experiences by those 15–17 years of age in particular.

**Socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds:** Groups included community members from a range of socioeconomic strata and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Allowance was made for the specific inclusion of Indigenous Australians, unemployed young people, and those living in rural and regional areas. Paired interviews were also included to further ensure good representation of those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

**Locations:** Eleven geographical locations across five states and territories included urban, rural, and Indigenous representation. Sydney and Melbourne were chosen because of their large and diverse population. They include a wide range of various subgroups within the population of young people. Brisbane and Perth were included because their geographical location and environment often results in differences in attitudes and behaviours.

The rural locations Coffs Harbour (NSW) and Toowoomba (Qld) represent regional areas (one coastal and one inland centre) and Northam (WA) and Condobolin (NSW) represent more distant rural areas. (We avoided rural Victoria and much of northern Queensland because of the bushfires and floods present at the time of the research).

The Indigenous locations for the groups with Indigenous young people cover five geographical areas: Sydney, Perth, Nambour (Qld), Palmerston (NT), and Wagga Wagga (NSW). This enabled us to capture a wide range of views of Indigenous young people.

**Stakeholders:** Stakeholders were chosen from a list supplied by the Office and supplemented by suggestions made by Elliott & Shanahan Research. The aim was to select a range of stakeholder organisations representing a variety of different stakeholders who deal in different ways with young people.

## 2.6 Reporting

At the conclusion of the fieldwork an analysis was made of the comments and responses of the target groups. A verbal report of results was then given to the Office. This document contains the results of all group discussions and interviews, together with a summary of the literature review (the more detailed literature review appears under separate cover).

It should be noted that this research is qualitative and diagnostic. No attempt has been made to attach numbers to the findings. Rather, the findings are indicative of the views held by young people and stakeholders who took part in this study. Verbatim quotations from the group discussions and interviews are included to illustrate and support the results.

## 3. Summary of literature review

### 3.1 Young people today

This summary outlines the key findings from a literature review that examined research on the way young people communicate and how to effectively communicate and engage with young people aged 12–25 years. There is an emphasis on Australian research and on how government can engage with this diverse target group.

There is an array of descriptors for young people today: Generation Y or Gen Y, Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008), the Millennial Generation (Bennett, 2003), DotNets (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina & Jenkins, 2002 cited in: Bennett, 2003) and the Echo Boom (McCrandle Research, 2007). These identifiers are descriptive rather than prescriptive, and are helpful in providing a picture of young people. In essence, as a group young people are highly educated and entertained, intensely connected and live life very much on their own terms (Grant, 2004; Salt, 2007; Mackay, 2008). Importantly, change is a key word for this subgroup.

Despite these varying descriptors and the evolving nature of young people, there is clear consistency in views about how best to communicate with young people. Key themes in the literature (Donovan Research, 1988; Shanahan, Elliott & Dahlgren, 2000; Stone et al. 2001; National Youth Roundtable, 2004; McCrandle Research, 2008; Elliott & Shanahan Research, 2008) are that communication with young people should:

- be of interest to them
- be personally relevant and ‘real’
- allow them to identify with and relate to the message
- be friendly, fun, humorous and creative
- be clear, concise and concrete
- empower, entertain, involve and allow for interaction
- reflect their beliefs, attitudes and social norms
- be easily and quickly accessible
- consider the notion of social approval (or threat of social disapproval)
- be respectful.

Communication should not preach, condescend, or over-promise; it should not be too complicated or too contrived; and it should not be authoritarian or ‘dumbed down’.

According to the literature, consultation and collaboration with young people in developing, designing and executing communication aimed at them is vital. Different messages and mediums for different subgroups of young people should be considered (Doggett, 1994; Shanahan et al. 2000). Rural and remote young people, Indigenous young people, multicultural young people and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were found to have specific communication needs.

Young people are living in a time of immense change, a time of digital revolution—‘a generation defined in and through its experience of digital computer technology’ (Buckingham & Willet, 2006). They are a product of modern life and live life at a fast pace, are time poor and thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards (Prensky, 2001; King, 2006). Interestingly, young people use computer technology to enhance their lifestyles, as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself. It is described as ‘their’

technology (Carroll et al. 2002). The literature reveals that young people will lead the way in teaching their elders, parents and teachers how to best use and manage technology in the future (Suoranta, 2003; Buckingham & Willet, 2006; Mackay, 2008).

### 3.2 Young people's activities, interests and expectations

There is considerable diversity within the target group in terms of age (early teen to early adulthood), level of education, gender, socioeconomic strata, family circumstances (living at home with parents, shared house, living with partner), interests, motivations, attitudes or identification with a subgroup or 'tribe'. However, television viewing still dominates as the most popular electronic media activity for young Australians (8–17 years) (ACMA, 2008a). The time that young people (8–17 years) spend on discretionary activities is roughly equally divided between non-electronic media activity (i.e. physical activity, 'hanging out' etc) and electronic media activity (TV, Internet, video/computer games, listening to music, watching a DVD, using a mobile phone); however, older teens (15–17 years) spend more time on electronic media activities than on non-electronic activities (ACMA, 2008a).

### 3.3 Communicating

Young people look for communication that is 'real', genuine and believable. Face-to-face communication is the single most important means used by young people to communicate with one another (National Youth Roundtable, 2004; Dunn, 2007).

The omnipresence of technology in the lives of young people has changed the way in which they communicate. For example, young people spend twice as much time 'messaging' (SMS, MMS) as talking on their mobile phones (ACMA, 2008a). This medium was found to be quick, direct and flexible; accordingly, it was necessary to meet the changing circumstances of modern life (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009). Moreover, the mobile phone was found to satisfy the social and leisure needs of young people and to reinforce their group identity. Convenience, freedom from the constraints of time and place and control were all found to be key drivers for mobile phone use (Carroll et al. 2002; NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009).

The mobile phone is ubiquitous in the lives of young people. Among 15–17-year-olds, 99 per cent of girls and 80 per cent of boys own their own phone, with the figures slightly lower (but still widespread) for 12–14-year-olds at 81 per cent and 70 per cent respectively (ACMA, 2008a). Suoranta (2003, 13) describes it as 'an extended umbilical cord between young people and their parents' but the following quote reveals that mobiles foster young people's independence and allow them (and their parents) to manage the changing face of families and family circumstances:

*Mobiles support the wellbeing of children and young people by supporting their agency or power to take independent action, increasing their capacity to act independently in their everyday life. Children and young people have previously told us that this agency was fundamental to their wellbeing. Mobiles also help children and young people to maintain and strengthen relationships across greater distances, including family relationships within separated families. We also found that mobiles empower parents by freeing them to undertake the activities and tasks that are increasingly part of family life including when both parents work. (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2007)*

### 3.4 Role of the internet

The literature highlighted that the internet is becoming a central part of young people's lives as it fulfils multiple roles: access to information, social interaction, entertainment, education and relaxation (Suoranta, 2003; Buckingham & Willet, 2006). Three in four young people aged 8–17 years had used the internet in a three-day period (ACMA, 2008a). Daily use of the internet increases with age (12–14-year-olds spent one

hour and 32 minutes online and 15–17-year-olds spent two hours and 24 minutes average). Most online time was spent doing homework, followed by messaging/chatting, using social networking sites/blogs, gaming and emailing. Girls spent more time online engaged in communication activities, while boys spent more time engaged in game playing (ACMA, 2008b).

Moreover, across the literature the internet was seen to have more benefits than shortcomings. Parents perceived the main benefits of their children's internet use to be learning and education (95 per cent), skills development (49 per cent) and maintaining social contacts with their friends (37 per cent) (ACMA, 2008c). While 4 in 10 parents were found to be concerned about their child's use of the internet, other social issues (drugs, alcohol, safety, education etc) were of greater concern (ACMA, 2008c).

Parents felt that it was harder to manage their children's internet use as they got older. This related to time spent on the internet and the nature of websites and information freely available to their children (ACMA, 2007). Other research found a disparity between parents and their children on how the internet is used (NetAlert, 2008; ACMA, 2008b) and that parental control over internet use was lacking (Generation Next, 2009). A sense of parental lack of understanding and awareness of the pervasiveness of the internet in young people's lives was an issue in the literature (Carr-Gregg, 2007; Rutherford & Bittman, 2008; Generation Next, 2009). Cyber-bullying was also found to be a growing concern (Carr-Gregg, 2007; ABC TV1, 2009).

### 3.5 Young people and government

Research reveals that young people are apathetic towards government for the following reasons: politics has little or no effect on their lives; they feel disconnected from or bewildered about conventional politics; and they believe they are not listened to and would have no influence on government decisions and policies (Eureka Strategic Research, 2006; Parliament of Australia, 2007). Importantly, young Australians were found to be more likely to look outside government for solutions to political problems (Bennett, 2003).

The research however reveals that this generation are more inclined towards collective identification with their peers than previous generations (Bennett, 2003; Mackay, 2008). While the literature made it clear that young people were apathetic towards, disconnected from and cynical about government and politics, promisingly, they were found to be attracted to and engaged in apolitical and community-related issues (especially local issues) and social action (volunteering, human rights, environment).

The literature (Youniss et al. 2002; Eureka Strategic Research, 2006; Parliament of Australia, 2007; Bell, Vromen & Collin, 2008) suggests that government may better engage with young people by:

- focusing on issues which interest and appeal to young people
- personalising political issues and activities (i.e. what will I get out of it?)
- focusing on the personal benefits of involvement/engagement (personal development, experience, knowledge, self-esteem)
- emphasising the notion of individual responsibility
- inspiring or empowering young people so they believe they can make a difference
- conveying a message of hope in the future
- allowing for reciprocal engagement.

Schools, parents, peers, the media and the Australian Electoral Commission were all found to play a role in promoting and educating young people on government and politics. Research also outlined the power of the internet in facilitating political engagement (Youniss et al. 2002; Cassell et al. 2006; Montgomery &

Gottlieb-Robles, 2006; Parliament of Australia, 2007; Vromen, 2008). The internet was found to have three uses as a political space for participation: as an information source; as a communication medium (either one-to-one dialogue, a broadcast, group dialogue or many people communicating with one agency); and as a virtual space for opinion forming and sharing (Vromen, 2008). The internet's dispersed, decentralised and reciprocal nature is 'better suited to fostering free exchange and increase the ability of ordinary people to create and sustain social movements' (Youniss et al. 2002, 138).

### 3.6 Impact of computer technology

The constantly developing world of technology has had a staggering impact on young people:

- The way in which they seek entertainment, news and information is all about speed and efficiency.
- Speed of information and communication tends to be more important to them than accuracy.
- Constant connectivity with their peers (mobile phones, social networking sites, email) is a major part of their lifestyle.
- Interactivity and involvement in communication is important to them, as is entertainment.
- They are focused on the here and now.
- They prefer graphics to text and manage information and communication by multi-tasking and parallel processing.
- They are a multimodal generation so multiple communication channels should be considered.
- There is a 'growing dichotomy between the written and spoken language, NINKU (no I'm not kidding you)'.
- Screen culture has resulted in a major shift in how they communicate and there are concerns that this may be changing their brains in ways that have a serious effect on personality and behaviour (i.e. use it or lose it).
- There is an opportunity for young people to gain informational support, social network support, emotional support and esteem support from technology, especially the internet.

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## 4. Stakeholder perceptions of young people

A total of 49 interviews were conducted with stakeholders across Australia. The sample covered those who work in government (federal, state and local), non-government organisations (NGOs), advertising, academia, social research, and music and youth events, as well as those who work in culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous fields. There was consensus on the main communication issues facing those who want to communicate with young Australians, particularly in terms of the difficulties they face in attempting to meaningfully engage with young people.

### 4.1 Influences on young people

Across the interviews, the key influences were thought to be parents and friends, the internet, music, the media and celebrities and idols.

**Parents and friends:** According to stakeholders, one of the key influences are parents and friends, with the former thought to often underestimate the influence they have on their children. Peers were said to have a strong influence as young people want acceptance from the peer group, whether it is a mainstream group or a fringe group. ‘Fitting in’ and ‘being accepted’ is still crucial.

*As much as they might be arguing with parents about boundaries and restraints they do take more notice of their parents than they think. (NGO)*

*They are talking to each other and they're much more inclined to get information and support where required from other people their own age than talking to their parents or teachers. (Government)*

**The internet:** A major influence, the internet increasingly provides information, blogs and social network sites and has widened the influence of peers. A much larger and wider sphere of peers now influences young people than just their immediate peer group. According to stakeholders the internet itself has become an integral part of the life of young Australians.

*Young people in the age group 15–18 years are better than older generations at using the technology because they've been exposed to it from a younger age. The true 'net' generation. It's part of their life. (NGO)*

**Music** was still thought by stakeholders to be a key influence, with MP3 having caused an explosion in music. Stakeholders pointed out that young people no longer have to buy albums—they can now buy songs. More importantly, music is being swapped and traded.

*Music is part of the fabric of your existence for all people, not just young people. Now you can access a band that plays to 100 people in a remote town in Canada and you can be into something no one else has heard of. (NGO)*

*With the internet and digital technology, if I was a teenager today, I could co-write a song with David Bowie on his website, I can pick any music I like and listen to it on my terms wherever I like, whenever I like. I can pick whether I want to pay for it, I can mash up and do my own remixes. So all of a sudden the level of creative input I can have if I choose to, and the level of influence over this how, where and when I consume music, is amazingly different. So technology has put me in the driver's seat to do it on my terms. We have to recognise that. (Music/events stakeholder)*

Some stakeholders suggested that brands such as Apple, Vans and Converse are also key influences on young people and that as established and valued brands they are able to drive trends.

**The media:** Although the media is still seen as an influence on young people, some stakeholders believe TV is becoming less of an influence, although certain programs (e.g. ‘reality’ programs) were said to be a strong influence. For example, stakeholders in media/advertising agencies believed that young people have a belief that it ‘is their God given right to be famous or to have their 15 minutes of fame’. They like reality TV, for example, because it gives them a chance to be famous (without really having to do anything or excel at anything). According to these stakeholders, those whom we laugh at on programs such as *Idol*, *So You Think You Can Dance*, etc demonstrate this belief.

This sense of celebrity and popularity is further evidenced through the rise of young people who ‘make it big very quickly’. Allied to this is the demonstration of popularity through the accumulation of ‘friends’ on Facebook, MySpace and Twitter sites. Blogs and uploading clips to YouTube were said to be other examples of an opportunity for 15 minutes of fame. Some stakeholders claimed that it’s exciting for young people to experience being seen and heard, particularly as they feel that society in general does not value or listen to them.

Stakeholders pointed out that most young people are media savvy and aware of the potential influence of the media on their lives. They were said to be good at monitoring their own media use, are aware of attempts by the media and organisations that use the media to influence them, and are more than capable of applying their own filters on communications directed to them.

*The media has obviously changed a lot in terms of its prevalence as an all encompassing influence on young people, everything that young people do is influenced now in some way by the media and the way they communicate with each other and their parents even. (NGO)*

*Young people are very critical media consumers because they make media as much as they consume it. They are very aware of attempts to influence them. (Academic)*

*Research has shown young people are very good at monitoring their own media use, at avoiding things that are inappropriate for them because they see them as irrelevant, scary or gross, and they’re also hyper-aware of overt attempts to influence them or to tell them what to be or think. They’re quite resistant to that, but what they are very open to is information being provided that they can play with in the forums they go to. (Researcher)*

**Celebrities and idols** (e.g. sports stars) also exert influence, particularly in terms of music, fashion and, to a lesser extent, attitudes. Their influence was said to decrease with age.

## 4.2 Segmentation

For many stakeholders the great diversity among young people today makes the need for segmentation even more important. Young people can belong to one group socially, but to another professionally, and there can be an extremely broad categorisation of subgroups within the youth culture. Most agreed that it is not possible to develop a message suitable for all young people. The array of different interests, use of different technologies and varying degrees of access to services makes the age range 12–24 years even more heterogeneous than it ever has been in the past.

*You say ‘young people’, but what have they really got in common apart from their age? Not a lot, you’ve got your goody-two-shoes at one end and your anarchists at the other, and God knows what in between. (Government)*

*The ‘one size fits all’ thing is certainly not going to work for young people and we have to, as people who try and communicate with them, get much better at better profiling the audience, because then you’ve got a better chance of saying, ‘ok, what are the barriers to them receiving our messages, or what’s going to be a trigger for it, and what media are they consuming? Therefore, how should we structure that message? I think we’ve done it far too simplistically in the past. (Government)*

*We know that you couldn't have one message or one look and feel that would apply to kids aged 12–24, obviously that wouldn't work, so we need to be quite targeted in terms of the age groups that we're targeting and target a particular look and particular message to a certain age group.* (Government)

Generally, stakeholders maintained there is a need to segment young people when communicating with them. The recommended methods of segmentation tended to reflect the experiences of stakeholders from a variety of different perspectives. Closely related to segmentation was the suggestion to 'think outside the square' and use different forms of media when communicating to young people.

**Traditional segmentation variables:** Many still suggested segmenting young people according to gender, age (e.g. under 18 years, 18–24 years), location (urban, rural/remote), education levels and so on. However, the use of only these traditional variables is now being questioned.

*Overall we segment 12–14 years (like to have fun), 15–17 years (coming into responsibility), 18–24 years (young adults) but segmentation may be a reflection of your own values so perhaps it's not the same as youth's own segments. Youth segments now include 10–15 years and anyone under 30.* (NGO)

*There's a big difference in the rituals, language and sensitivities that they have between a 12-year-old and a 25-year-old. It goes back to what is the message, the communication. You need research first to understand the audience.* (Music/events stakeholder)

*Gender is too broad a category now to make any reliable distinctions. In general I'm not convinced it's a highly meaningful category for the purposes of thinking about communication.* (Academic)

*I really do believe that recognising the diversity of views that you would have in either group (male/female), is as important as saying, 'this is the group we need to reach about this'.* (Academic)

**Young people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and young Indigenous people:**

Many suggested that a culturally and linguistically diverse background was one variable that could be used in segmenting young people, and in some cases when communicating with them they need to be treated separately from the mainstream youth culture. However, those who worked with young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds suggested that communicating with young people of different cultural backgrounds has to be more carefully implemented. For example, they contended that most communication created for those from language other than English (LOTE) backgrounds tended to be for parents. Young Australians of non-English speaking background either already speak English or are learning English. (However, because of the role of parents and the time and effort parents put into ensuring their children have opportunities etc, it can be important to target parents in communications as well as the young people themselves).

*This (LOTE communication) goes over young people because it's really targeting people whose first language isn't English which generally speaking, isn't young people.* (Researcher)

*If you are a young Chinese person who has been here for five years whose parents migrated out here, you won't traditionally be like your parents and read the Chinese newspaper everyday and you won't necessarily listen to Chinese radio or watch Chinese television programmes from Hong Kong or China, you'll sit between that and what the popular youth culture is. There's nothing in between. There's nothing targeting young people like this, which is contemporary, which is up market, which uses the internet, which they (young people) do, which uses street-based communication methods, which goes to their events and things like that.* (Researcher)

*You can have a mass media message to young Aboriginal people around Australia... it will strike a chord, but to really have an impact, messages about asthma, enrol to vote, domestic violence, those key Government messages, if you really want cut-through in those Central Australia communities, you really have to do something for them separately. (Indigenous stakeholder)*

Stakeholders asserted that there are attitudinal differences and cultural differences among young people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and these need to be taken into account in communicating with them. There are differences within the culturally and linguistically diverse subgroup of young people (i.e. different social networks, social activities). Many subgroups of those from non-English speaking background don't identify with mainstream cultural activities (e.g. drinking). The cultural context has to be addressed and messages formulated accordingly, and often different distribution channels considered.

*Chinese young people like karaoke. It came and went as a phenomenon in Australian culture, but it's still very popular for them. There are many karaoke places around the city and in Hurstville and so on. If you go there on any given day, especially on holidays and weekends, that's where many young people go, and that's where they socialise. That to me is a very good opportunity to extend that binge drinking campaign from the clubs into the karaoke places. Very simple, but that's where they are. (Researcher)*

*There are a lot of different groups, Turkish speaking, former Yugoslav, Chinese etc, where their interest is motivated around one thing, it may be religion, sport, cars, music—they attract a lot of traffic because they have a common interest. Whether you call popular youth culture or not, there are these things that young people are attracted to that don't fall into the purview of any normal youth practice. (Researcher)*

*It's a difficult thing, what I'm suggesting is that the youth culture has many strata to it, and it's not just one culture, and many strata within the non-English speaking groups. (Researcher)*

**Attitudes and behaviours:** Some advertising agency stakeholders said they tended to segment on the basis of attitudes, behaviour and lifestage.

*A skateboarder in Sydney probably has more in common with a skateboarder in Japan than with a kid from a different group in say, Sydney or Melbourne. (Advertising agency)*

Marketers and advertising stakeholders, in particular, acknowledged that there are numerous subgroups within youth culture and those subgroups, or 'tribes', can be identified by distinctive symbols and imagery. They look for tribes and a fundamental truth or attitude relating to that tribe. Segmenting by tribe allows communicators to choose the most appropriate channels for those tribes, particularly when the target audience, which tends to multi-task when communicating or receiving communication, is bombarded with communication.

Even though there are some distinct differences between youth subgroups in terms of interests, attitudes and concerns, music was thought to be a relatively common denominator. While there are specific music styles, most young people are happy to experiment (to some extent) with music outside their core music taste. Hence, there is a degree of crossover and particular bands or songs that have wide appeal can be found.

In a similar vein, social marketing campaigns can rely on segmentation. Past illicit drug campaigns have used psychographic, attitude and lifestyle segmentation to help tailor the right messages to the right groups and this resulted in three different message strategies.

*When you're trying to deal with things that are more complex... what we know about communication patterns with these groups, is that you have to actually break it down. Do some research that gives you a bit of a snapshot of the different attitudes and beliefs across that cohort and then you target your communications to those different groups. You don't just bug spray them. (Academic)*

*The message that 'it's not ok to hit women' is pretty much out there. If there are people out there who are still doing it, it's because they've got attitudes and they're part of a community with attitudes, who have worked out a way of rationalising that kind of behaviour. (Academic)*

*Need more sophisticated campaigns that say more than 'domestic violence is a crime'. They need to address a particular attitude that feeds into an issue such as sexual violence. (Researcher)*

**Issues:** Some maintained that it is easier to segment young people according to their interests or the issues that they are concerned about. Again, early determination of what these interests and issues are was considered important and necessary. However, there was some debate as to how concerned young people are about social and community issues.

According to stakeholders, this generation could be described as marketing savvy and socially aware, though not necessarily socially active. Some thought they could be described as selfish and competitive (particularly those often referred to as Generation Y\*). Some stakeholders were sceptical about whether young people today are more socially aware than other generations. Some suggested that they want to be proud of themselves, they want to feel as though they make a difference, but also they know there is social currency in being involved and, as such, see opportunities to gain personally from it. Maybe it is just that as some causes (e.g. the environment) have become more mainstream, it is more important that young people are seen by other young people to be doing the right thing. Nonetheless, stakeholders felt they will participate during times of real need such as the recent bushfires, whales beaching themselves, and so on.

Interestingly, a few suggested that young people are unfairly blamed for seemingly being socially inactive and that this is a symptom of society as a whole.

*They take what they need and ignore the rest. (NGO)*

*My sense is that they know a lot more, they've been exposed to a lot more, but in a lot of ways they've had less responsibility and are less street smart in some ways. (NGO)*

*Youth today say, 'you tell me why should I do that?' They are less likely to defer to authority, less likely to make up an excuse, i.e. less likely to play the game. (Government)*

*I think in some ways young people often bear the blame for what are actually much broader shifts in our culture. On one hand there is this very dominant rhetoric which is the individual takes responsibility for everything... a sort of move I think. Corporate and Managerial language has infiltrated everything, including universities, so suddenly everything is a competitive transaction. (Academic)*

*Self belief, understanding their own rights. 'You can't make me' attitude and, less compliant, happy to challenge the status quo and rock the boat. Previous generations would not rock the boat too much unless critical. Today's average youth will rock the boat because they can and don't need the status quo. (Government)*

*Even though I don't think it's wise to get caught up in generalisations about generations there are some interesting observations. Generation Y are selfish, they know best. The one's coming after Generation Y are a little bit less selfish.' (Researcher)*

\* Generation Y are generally recognised as those born between 1980 and 1994. Generation Z are those born from 1995 or who are currently aged 14 and under (McCrindle Research, 2007).

## 4.3 How young people communicate: the role of technology

### 4.3.1 Importance of technology

Some stakeholders pointed out that public discussion and media debate on the use of technology by young people assumes that something sinister or negative (e.g. cyber-bullying, predatory abuse etc) will happen as a result of their use of new technologies. However, stakeholders thought that the influence of new technology on young people is not a black or white issue and that communicators need to understand the importance of technology in the lives of young people, their attitudes to it and their use of it.

The view was commonly expressed that social networking sites give young people a sense of community. Social networking sites are the modern-day 'hangouts', (i.e. young people now use these sites to hang out, much like they used to do at shopping centres and parks). Young people use social networking sites to maintain friendships, to build identity (e.g. by exploring what music and fashion they like, ideas and political views in an issue-based way) and to help and support each other on personal issues. Social networking reinforces their current social lives and social relationships. Similarly their use of mobile phones helps young people stay connected.

*Technology and that capacity to be in touch and to get what you want is a really significant issue with young people today. (NGO)*

*Probably in metropolitan areas it's easier for them to be with their friends. I suspect that technology has helped kids in more remote areas to be in contact. Socialisation during adolescence is a very important thing and without that it can lead to social isolation as a factor in youth suicide. (NGO)*

*There is compelling evidence that young people use these new technologies in pro-social ways. These are largely technologies of communication which are positive forces in young people's lives and they are essential to the way young people communicate. (Academic)*

*The constant texting that young people do is a way of hooking up and connecting, it's not, as sometimes assumed, an alienating force necessarily. (Academic)*

However, it was claimed that not all young people are tech savvy and heavy users of technology. Some segments don't have access to technology. For example, Indigenous young people were thought to be most likely to be disadvantaged in terms of communication, either through geographic isolation, socioeconomic circumstances, and/or their suspicion and mistrust of government.

But, overall, stakeholders maintained technology has always been important to young people and is becoming increasingly important, particularly with the development and growth of 3G networks and devices that allow mobile internet usage. The Apple iPhone is likely to drive this as other brands seek to develop similar phone technologies.

*Some young people are disadvantaged by not having computer access at home so we aim to provide access to libraries where they can use a computer... Young people's use of social networking has been a big influence on us, we are still catching up with how to use Facebook. News now comes to them through Twitter not through conventional sources and it spreads like wildfire. (NGO)*

### 4.3.2 Need for instant communication

Many stakeholders believe young people have a short attention span and are easily and quickly bored. They want instant gratification and results; hence mobiles, instant messaging, and social networking sites are important to them. Many stakeholders said that young people often mentioned boredom, which was often their stated reason for drinking alcohol, taking drugs, speeding on the roads and using SMS and social networking sites.

Allied to this is the way in which they use technology. According to stakeholders, communication by young people is generally very quick, short, sharp and to the point, hence the popularity of SMS, Twitter, instant messaging etc. However, some stakeholders felt it also tends to be very superficial, rather than deep or emotional, communication. Stakeholders thought (or hoped) that the preferred medium for 'genuine' or 'real' communication was still face to face.

*How are young people communicating? And what impact does that have on their ability to have face-to-face communication? I think my generation thinks it's (communicating via SMS and Facebook etc) really weird because it's so remote. (Government)*

*I don't think we're losing intensity of communication or intensity of emotional connection at all. And I think one of the other things that we have to keep in mind is that we're dealing with the most educated population of young people we've ever had. (Academic)*

*This is my concern... (Regarding work relationships) there's a reluctance to engage in any face-to-face or phone communication. And the implications of that are, you can really get the wrong message from an email... the relationship that you may or may not develop with that person can go completely awry if your whole relationship is based on an email and you never actually speak with them or interact with them.*

*Is this affecting their ability to form relationships with people, or form positive relationships with people because if you only have a working relationship that you email, is that a relationship? Young people probably think it is because they tend to use these channels more often. (Government)*

Stakeholders claimed that quick communication dominates to the extent that abbreviated language has reached beyond the boundaries of SMS and the internet. Curriculum vitae contain text-type abbreviations, and spoken communication often uses the same abbreviations (a point mentioned by the young people themselves).

*It's a very casual way of communicating. Kids today have less and less experience of formal 'communication' (e.g. writing letters, job applications etc) and how to put together different texts for different contexts. They do a lot of work on this in schools to overcome it, but at the end of the day they'll take it or leave it because they have technology. (NGO)*

*They call them the 'bit' generation because they're used to receiving information in chunks or bits. (Government)*

### 4.3.3 Technology enables multi-tasking

Confirming what young people themselves said in the study, stakeholders maintained that the advances in technology also mean that young people communicate while doing other things. Mobile phones and internet are often used at the same time and/or while engaged in other activities (e.g. watching TV, talking to friends). Young people no longer surf the net to discover things; they are using it for specific searches and for a great deal of their communication, which allows them to multi-task.

### 4.3.4 Technology and social engagement

Communication technology is an integral part of the lives of most young Australians. Stakeholders claimed that technology's influence goes beyond its role as an aid to communication and now influences the assumptions people have about social engagement. For example, young people are developing different ideas about what's public and what's private. There is a far greater willingness among young people, compared to previous generations, to share information and to put photos that may previously have been considered 'private' up in a more public domain. Interestingly, along with this behaviour is a strong sense of censure against anyone who misuses or abuses this information.

*I find it really interesting about Facebook and MySpace and Twitter, how willingly so many people have given up their privacy and used this as a new platform. I don't know what the implications are of that.*

*And I don't think they've really thought about the consequences and what the implications might be. (NGO)*

*Just the whole fact that you have 'friends' on Facebook. Well they're not all 'friends', they can be the slightest acquaintance, but the terminology is 'friends', so what does 'friend' actually mean in this modern term? (Government)*

#### 4.3.5 Face-to-face communication

Despite the ever-increasing and important use of technology by young people, face-to-face communication was still regarded by stakeholders as the most common way young people communicate with each other. Once again, that belief reflects the comments made by the young people who took part in this study.

The truth of the communication was thought more easily assessed face to face and the intimacy offered in these situations was also a desirable element. However, as noted in the research among young people themselves, face-to-face communication by marketers or organisations (e.g. spruikers, street approaches) is often too confronting.

### 4.4 Communicating with young people

#### 4.4.1 Experiential communication

Stakeholders who work in the commercial world maintained that it is important to realise that any communication aimed at young people will be competing with a range of messages from a variety of sources for their attention. To cut through the clutter of communication directed to young people, advertisers and marketers are trying to go beyond just communicating with young people, trying to engage with them, but trying to get them to 'touch' and 'feel' the brand; in other words, 'experience' the brand. It's the brand and advertising equivalent of Web 2.0—they are now trying to make the brand experience interactive, take it beyond just trial and use. For example:

- Coca-Cola still uses TV advertising, but it also attempts to go well beyond TV; for example, it has run a number of promotions where consumers can design their own skin for a Coke can or bottle. One such promotion linked consumers across the globe by combining the designs of two people onto a single can. Through promotions such as this, Coca-Cola is connecting with young people but also helping them connect with others around the world.
- Tooheys Extra Dry gets the audience involved in creating entertainment. 'Six beers of separation' becomes an online TV show and movie proving the six degrees of separation concept over a beer. People were invited to submit an entry to be one of six people. Print, outdoor and online advertising was used to tell people about it. Ultimately it is target market-driven. (Recent promotions by Doritos and Smiths Crisps are similar experiential attempts at communicating with the target market by encouraging participation in the formulation of new flavours and communication.)

*From the communications perspective, broadly speaking you can break it down to three things. There's branded messages which are very much the traditional advertising communications, then you have branded entertainment and branded utility. The trend in the last few years, particularly with youth brands that are really engaging, is much more in these two areas. For example, Nike now hardly do any advertising, the bulk of their money goes into other stuff in the entertainment and utility space. Nike Run London was an event designed to engage with 20 something runners; rather than doing a press ad, it adds something to their life. (Advertising agency)*

The internet can play a large role in experiential opportunities, but stakeholders debate whether experiential marketing/engagement works. Allowing young people to experience the brand and what it offers them can be important. For example, a campaign in Queensland for drug driving gave out 3-D glasses on campuses across Queensland to promote the idea that perception changes when taking drugs. The 'one punch can kill' campaign used giant inflatables to promote alternatives to fighting, so a giant inflatable soccer pitch was erected at music festivals, the idea being that the alternative to music was sport.

In addition, some suggested that to encourage young people to experience a brand you need to get out and be in the places they are, such as festivals like the Big Day Out; others said that festivals are ineffective for most brands and causes. According to most stakeholders, the product or cause has to fit the festival; otherwise it is out of place and therefore lacks relevance.

*You turn up at Big Day Out with a hundred other brands, and they are all so ### up on drugs, they are not going to notice you. Marketing at those festivals is a waste of money. I laugh at the sponsors, unless they are an alcohol sponsor, who is actually going to sell something. Most of the kids are wasted and so focused on the bands they are not going to remember 'Silent Disco brought to you by ###'. (Advertising agency)*

*Experiential is relevant if it's relevant. (Advertising agency)*

*Experiential engagement is important, so face to face or allowing the audience to be engaged with a specific brand or product or a social marketing campaign is really effective. Digital engagement or participation is another that works well. (Advertising agency)*

#### 4.4.2 Communicating by mobile

Communicating with young people via their mobiles may increase; however, in order for young people to give permission to receive messages stakeholders believe they will want something in return. Stakeholders thought it likely that advertisers would begin to provide mobile phone credit to those prepared to receive their messages. Podcasts were also thought to be on the rise and successful. Bar codes for mobile phones are also starting to grow in popularity, because consumers feel as though they have control over whether they access the message; the disadvantage is that the communicator still has to engage with the young person to give them the bar code.

Stakeholders in the music/event industry made specific mention of the evolving use of technology in combination with sending messages to mobile phones; for example, using rock stars to convey messages to young people either at concerts, through the media or through the mobile phone and linking these messages to online sites that can provide further information, with the online site updated regularly, and using digital technology in wristbands that direct young people to sources of further information.

*If we can find more and more ways of getting meaningful content, accessible on their terms when they want it on their mobile phones. Like young people are getting pressure to take pills and if they have any doubt in mind, they can press a button on their mobile and see the downside of taking the pill. (Music/events stakeholder)*

*Jimmy Barnes' latest CD is on a wristband, you plug it into your computer plus it's a fashion accessory and a link to a website is on it as well... The technology will evolve and get more sophisticated in terms of our ability to get messages onto those phones, anywhere at any time. The owner of the phone still has to choose whether they want to access it, but that's where all of a sudden the 'rock star' side can help... We're using the rock stars as a positive diversion to get the youth to the site we want them to go to. (Music/events stakeholder)*

### 4.4.3 Viral communication

Stakeholders commented that viral campaigns work when they are done well.

*Virals get passed on because they are bloody good. They are either funny, or shocking, embarrassing or showing something that no one's ever seen before. That's why they get passed on. (Advertising agency)*

One interesting example of the use of viral communication is that done by the Traffic Accident Commission (TAC) in Victoria. It introduced a social networking site page focused on encouraging young people to find messages for themselves. This is based on the notion of young people seeking out the media, not the media seeking them. The website is promoted at festivals and events, where young people are encouraged to join the webpage. According to stakeholders, what matters is 'it's your choice'.

Through the site people can email a 'yellow card' to one friend who sends it on to another and so on. The card contains a personalised video message that the sender creates and sends to a friend about that friend's dangerous driving. The essential message is that it is from a friend rather than government or an authority. TAC scripts the messages and you can choose who you will send it to and what the message is (by choosing from a list of safety messages).

This form of communication is tied to soccer (Melbourne Victory soccer team promotions), which is gaining momentum in Melbourne. It targets young men who live in outer suburbs where cars are popular and 'hoon' behaviour common. The risk is that the 'yellow card' is a joke to some, but traditional media messages don't work with this young male target group. When they get a yellow card, they may consider their behaviour because the sender has to be identified. You can't be anonymous and send a message. TAC still uses mainstream media and direct mail, but by using the web and email it is tapping into another network (i.e. peer-to-peer communication).

The aim is to target those people who might be prepared to alter their behaviour because of the influence of another ('subjective norm'); that is, significant others' preferences about whether one should engage in this behaviour or not (theory of reasoned action\*). What TAC hopes for is that in combination with main media the new media aims at giving people permission to speak about an issue, talk to others about an issue (e.g. drink-driving). The ads allow the community to speak about the issue to mates/relatives (i.e. significant others).

*It (internet) probably has advantages over traditional forms of social marketing in terms of the young people it can reach and the ways it can reach them and also the context in which to reach them, given that new technologies are playing key roles in young people's social networking and young people's social and intimate relations. If you want to change or alter those social or intimate relations in some way, then why not use new technology as part of that. (Academic)*

### 4.4.4 Combination media

Many stakeholders suggested that in communicating with young people the most effective strategy is to employ a combination of approaches (mainstream and online) but they stressed such a strategy depends on the campaign and the audience.

According to most stakeholders in the study, traditional media still gives reach and has clout. As well, TV is important as it can give validity to the product/issue—it implies size, importance, serious intention for the message to be heard. TV is often best used as a prompt to online; however, the website has to have the right content, simply driving them to the website is not enough. If the site is 'no good', word is passed around very quickly.

\* The theory of reasoned action Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975 proposes that volitional behaviour is predicted by one's intention to perform the behaviour which is a function of attitude towards that behaviour and subjective norms with respect to that behaviour (i.e. how 'significant others' view that behaviour).

*It's really about thinking outside the square a bit instead of the traditional popular youth culture things, there are off shoots of that...I'm not saying they (young people from other cultures) are different, I'm just saying they're differently organised, so if you think you're going to capture all youth through one stream, it's not going to happen. You have to have a diversity of streams.'* (Researcher)

*There is still a need for mainstream media communication, but they should be seen as a part of a much broader tapestry of options and when it comes to new technology options, I just think empowerment is so important.* (Music/events stakeholder)

*Young people are still exposed to the main media, for example, adult campaigns get through to kids. They play back TV ads to us. The credibility comes from the main media campaigns which allows us to provide information to young people. By using main media in general the issue is being raised, for example drink driving, but young people are not being picked on. It's for many adults who drink, not just young people but it is indirectly aimed at young people.* (Government)

Stakeholders claimed that today TV needs to be used carefully, as young people seem to be watching less TV, but tending to watch specific programs. It is important to find the most appropriate media for the audience rather than assuming that TV is the way to go. Cinema is still seen as a good avenue for young people.

*Cinema is still very important to communicating to young people. The attendance figures are healthy, especially those in regional areas where there are less entertainment options.* (Government)

#### 4.4.5 Social networking sites

Social networking sites might provide an avenue to communicate and engage with young people; however, young people, according to stakeholders, are wary about the adult world invading their space. Therefore, any use of social networking sites has to be relevant and real, a view confirmed by young people.

There appeared to be growing interest from the variety of stakeholders with whom we spoke in trying to have a presence on MySpace and Facebook, although few seemed to have a great understanding of how to go about it (some assumed that simply having a presence would be enough, whereas a small number realised that if it wasn't done well it would be a waste of time).

*The main danger is when brands go in heavy handed. They think 'oh let's do something on Facebook' and it's just trying to force the brand in there rather than thinking how can we be useful, how can we do something they will actually want, it's back to that notion of not interrupting people. You shouldn't be using the internet or the social networks as another way of interrupting people. It's about thinking 'people use this, what can we do for them that they are going to like and find beneficial or entertaining'.* (Advertising agency)

*I personally think stay away from their Facebook and MySpace because it's their thing. Text messaging, I think there's probably an opportunity but I'm not sure how to utilise it. The great thing about internet technology is we can make it interactive and we can change the look and feel and you can manage the amount of information that is given or shown at one time.* (Researcher)

## 4.5 Young people and government

### 4.5.1 Perceptions of government

Stakeholders' views about what young people think of the government, and how they relate to it, were not all that different from the opinions voiced by the young people themselves. In essence, the following points sum up stakeholder views about young people and government:

- Government has little relevance to young people. Young people don't regard the Government as playing any significant role in their lives other than in education, in making the rules that govern their lives, and in government advertising telling them what they can, and mostly what they can't, do.
- It is unlikely young people differentiate between levels of government (federal, state, and local), with most assuming they would have little knowledge of who is responsible for what and unlikely to care. Young people are unlikely to differentiate between departments and agencies, although some said Centrelink was likely to be most familiar. The issues (jobs, school, training, housing etc) rather than the departments were of greater importance to young people. This point was confirmed by the young people in the study.
- Young people were generally unlikely to engage with government, because they believed they would not be heard and that nothing would come of such engagement. This view contrasts to other parts of their lives when they use blogs and social networking, where they can be heard, and people do pay attention. Why engage with government when others are willing to listen to and engage with them?

*Young people probably feel left behind and that they are not a key group for government and that for the Government communicating with them is not as important as communicating with their parents or their teachers. So they often feel like government bypasses them in order to get to them via others. (NGO)*

*They are cynical about politicians and government, the process doesn't interest them. They don't understand the process. They distrust the Government and don't differentiate between state and federal. (Music/events stakeholder)*

*I don't think they really care about it. Is it the Government and do I have to do it or not? (Researcher)*

- For disadvantaged young people, the challenge is trust. Those who have had contact with various government services and have not had good experiences are likely to lack trust in them and be unwilling to engage with government.

*Government doesn't care about them and they don't care about the Government. DOCS is the Government and DOCS is bad. They have only ever had bad experiences and they are used to being messed around so they shy away from attempts to communicate and engage. (NGO)*

### 4.5.2 Engaging with government

Stakeholders generally thought young people may engage on issues of high personal importance provided there is some personal reward and they can be convinced it will make a difference. Some believed they would engage/communicate regarding their own health and welfare if given the right opportunity—although they were unsure what would be the right opportunity.

*We find, particularly with those kids under the age of about 18, they want a reward or incentive for doing something, whether it be adopting the communication or behaviour or simply just responding to us. (NGO)*

One interviewee suggested for government to engage with young people it must make sure that it a) is clear about why it wants to engage with them, b) details the scope of the engagement and is realistic about the outcomes that can be achieved, about how the feedback will be used and how likely it is to be adopted, and c) communicates back to young people about what it heard, what it did with their views, and what might be achieved or the outcome. Don't leave them hanging.

Stakeholders strongly maintained that the government must reach young people and minimise the effort required from young people to engage with it. They felt you can't rely on young people wanting to reach out to, or find, government. There was, therefore, thought to be a role for third-party organisations that already have a relationship or some level of engagement with young people. Another reason put forward for working with a third party was that third parties often have young people involved in making decisions and developing policies, ideas and communications. Involvement in a partnership can allow government representation to be minimised, which stakeholders thought would make it more likely that young people would accept the message or communication. Stakeholders felt that there is some sense that third parties care about you, your health etc, whereas the government wants to control you, minimise costs or make things easy for itself. Third parties were also said to be very important for helping reach disadvantaged young people, particularly as trust and credibility are key hurdles in engaging with them.

*It's very easy to engage with young people who are already engaged through a local youth council or their SRC at school. It's somewhat easy to engage with young people who are in school because you can just go to the school or funnel communication through the school. It's quite difficult to engage with young people who are very disengaged but given they access services, maybe for homelessness, health, a youth centre, there is at least some structure that you can use. In some ways the most difficult group to get to is the mainstream group who is no longer at school. They often don't access services so they are in this void when it comes to engaging with them through stakeholders. The only options are the internet and mainstream media but they don't respond because they are not interested. (NGO)*

*One of the useful things we find is our relationship with different youth services, so being able to tap into and get various youth services on board to assist in facilitating feedback from young people has been key, particularly for those groups who would normally miss out. (NGO)*

*It's about access and support. Instead of us having to go out to all these different sorts of groups of young people and making sure they feel comfortable with the process and knowing what it's all about, because the service providers have existing contact with a group of young people, they have existing rapport. Forming bonds is one of the hardest things when you are working with young people. (NGO)*

*I'd rather see where we're back doing more events and joint activities through the film and music industries, and those sorts of third parties that give you the credibility and can carry the message, and can probably say things that you (government) can't. (Government)*

Stakeholders gave a number of examples where they had gone into partnership with an organisation which already had a good relationship with young people. For example, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) successfully used Triple J as part of a campaign to encourage young people to enrol to vote and to vote. Young people were offered the chance to win Big Day Out tickets for enrolling to vote and visiting the Rock Enrol website [www.rockenrol.com.au](http://www.rockenrol.com.au). The AEC also successfully used a university marketing organisation to help it engage with students at university through peer-to-peer engagement during Orientation Week.

### 4.5.3 Barriers to engagement

Stakeholders suggested that when government tries to engage with young people, it faces difficulties additional to those inherent in communicating with young people generally:

- Engaging with government will never be seen as ‘cool’ by young people.
- Government, as ‘a brand’, will always struggle in its communications with young people because one arm or department is likely to be doing something that young people think of as very ‘un-youth’ or ‘uncool’.
- Young people can’t see the connection between government and issues.
- Government is, by nature, parent-like, which makes its engagement with young people difficult.
- Young people can’t see the connection between government process and issues that concern them.
- Developing and implementing government communication generally involves bureaucracy and unwieldy, slow processes.

*The problems or challenges are not whether we’re using the right channels (to communicate with youth), the challenges lie with the bureaucracy not being prepared to adopt them. (Music/events stakeholder)*

*The main thing that the Government in this space (communication with young people) have to understand and if they can’t accept it, they shouldn’t go forward, it’s not our world, it’s their world. If we’re going to do the online space it’s young people’s world. We are outsiders. We certainly have a role to play in that world, to provide them, pretty much on their terms, with information and the tools to empower them. (Music/events stakeholder)*

*They’ll (young people) say they’re not interested in the government and they’re not interested in politics, and ‘who cares?’ But, yes, everyone’s worried about the environment and worried about third world poverty, and climate change, and they don’t actually see how things connect. (Government)*

*I think that’s one of the challenges for the government in regard to getting messages out to young people. The machinery is so unwieldy, it takes so long from the research, development, approval before it actually hits, that it’s almost out of date before it’s out.*

*And often they have to water it down so much that it no longer is relevant.*

*With ‘ministerial approval’ and that sort of thing, depending on the department...it can really just change things so much that it’s not acceptable. That is what we would say that working through organisations like us, where we are seen as independent and we have some distance from the government, we’ve got the capacity to move more quickly on things, is quite an effective way of getting stuff out.*

*And producing things in a format that is user friendly. (NGO)*

Those from disengaged families were thought also likely to be disadvantaged. For example, if parents don’t know how government systems work, their children are also unlikely to know. Young people from households where the parents distrust government or don’t have the capacity to engage with government are at risk of missing out on and not understanding the government services or avenues available to them. The solution is to increase the numeracy, literacy and overall educational attainment skills of parents.

#### 4.5.4 Get young people involved

Those working with young people through non-government organisations and in some government areas in particular, suggested it is important to involve them in decision making, whether it be in policy development and/or communication development. Stakeholders thought that, whenever possible, young people should be used to engage with other young people to involve them and obtain their views, either directly (through forums) or indirectly via research.

*Young people are the best experts on their own lives, therefore young people commenting on communication strategies will lead to better outcomes than if those strategies are developed entirely by adults. It's also important to recognise that for instance having five Young People of the Year comment on a particular communication strategy means that you've consulted with some young people, but not a broad spectrum of young people. It's important to involve young people across the target you are looking to. (NGO)*

#### 4.5.5 Provide instant feedback

Some stakeholders felt that a lack of immediacy may be the greatest hurdle in engaging young people. Young people, it was claimed, are used to instantaneous communication and results. The nature of government decision making may simply be too slow to ever really engage them. Government stakeholders said that even if they did everything right and got young people involved in issues and decision making, the time it would take before they saw any effect or real change was likely to deter them from future participation. Young people want to be involved in issues that affect the here and now; they want to see immediate effects.

#### 4.5.6 Government use of existing social networks

Some government agencies that have used, or are planning to use, existing websites or social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, seem to have little understanding of how to best use such sites. Those who tried them unsuccessfully learned that not only does their inclusion need to be relevant but also that continual change and updating of content is required, because that's what young people are used to with these websites. Those who haven't used them are assuming that they just have to be there; they haven't thought too much about what they need to do to be effective.

Many stakeholders were concerned about the possibility of government entering existing social networking sites used by young people (particularly MySpace and Facebook, which are essentially private social sites). Stakeholders maintained that young people were wary about the adult world 'invading their space', and would be particularly so if the government entered the social network sites they currently use. While there was concern about the potential entry of the government onto sites like MySpace and Facebook, there was more acceptance of its entry to public sites that young people used for obtaining information or advice.

*To go back to communication, I see that it's going to change very quickly, and the government has to follow it a bit, particularly by using more innovative methods, like online blogs such as on chinatown.com, and hit some of these places where people are going in big numbers, like the restaurants too. If you go into any Chinese restaurant on the weekends you'll see hundreds of people, and many of them will be young people. (Culturally and linguistically diverse stakeholder)*

*Facebook is probably not the place for government. It's for social networking not really talking about issues. It's more of a self-identifying thing rather than a forum to discuss or create action. (Government)*

*To me it feels like we're kind of encroaching in an area where we shouldn't be, because the whole point of these social networking media is, that's where they want to be 'meeting' their friends. Do they really want to get government messages in there? Are they open to receive those messages? For me before we get into those spaces, we need to find that information out because if it's not appropriate for us to be there, then it's just going to backfire on you badly. (Government)*

*Governments have discussed the internet and that can be a trap, you can get eaten alive but having said that there is an opportunity to forge proper partnerships with the big net providers. MySpace has a social impact channel with 4 million users and rising and about 85 per cent of the market has Facebook and so on. But taking up banner ads is like more of the same that didn't work before. There's got to be clearer ways of integrating with those companies, and those companies are ready to engage and talk. They know if you structure a partnership properly revenue will come. (Music events stakeholder)*

*I'm not really enamoured with the idea of going into Facebook and putting government ads in there because the whole point of that site is it's a social networking one, and do they really want to see a boring government ad or even if we think they're very important topics, is it appropriate? Are you being too much of a try-hard? (Government)*

*I think sometimes people make an assumption that 'if we put it on the internet young people will see it or want to see it' and that's certainly not the way things work. Like even with Facebook and MySpace people assume if you put something on there young people will go there because that's where young people already are. That's wrong, they're in their own parts of it and they are using it for certain things and unless you're using it in the same way, in terms of keeping things updated, doing some fairly labour intensive work to keep those things up to date, then it doesn't have impact. When they use these sites it is about constant interaction so that is one of the major challenges, how do you do that? If you are not responding to and keeping up with their updates and communication they leave pretty quickly and don't come back. Also the hours you need to be responding to them are generally not the hours in which we work. (NGO)*

*That's where they socialise and network, but it's also a place where they are with each other, so there's a big question around government's role in that space, whether they've got a right to be in there in the first place, and if they do, how should they interact in that space? I think what's happened in the past with MySpace and Facebook... is that Ministers have gone, 'I have to have my own Facebook page because then I'll be able to talk with young people'... you're probably going to be told to, you know, nick off. (Government)*

*Letting the government onto your Facebook page would be like letting your parents onto your Facebook. What are they going to do with your information? (Academic)*

*It might be more about driving them from Facebook to your site or to a game or whatever, rather than trying to be trendy and funky and out there when you're not. (Government)*

#### 4.5.7 Government website for young people

As with all communications, websites need to be relevant and there was some doubt about how a government website can be relevant to young people. Some also questioned whether the Government is capable of developing a website aimed at young people and raised concerns about its expertise, its risk-averse nature and its capacity to continually update and refine content. A website for young people would also need to be simple, easy to navigate, have all the appropriate links to services and provide opportunities to do what young people need to do. For example, stakeholders asserted that young people won't use government websites that don't enable them to submit forms or complete transactions online and will not use them if they don't get feedback on their requests.

Stakeholders commented that web-based engagement needed to be done correctly. Young people are very sceptical of what seems to be an adult attempt to enter their space in the case of social network sites, but they may be more amenable to a designated young people's website. However, young people no longer visit websites just because they look good. Sites must have something to offer them in terms of entertainment, personal gain, or an opportunity to connect and communicate with others. Nonetheless, stakeholders claimed that advertising in a way that is relevant and entertaining but also allows them to pass that communication on to others via the web is potentially a good strategy.

*There's very few opportunities for young people to discuss issues amongst themselves, very few ways for them to engage in non-text based responses. You can't upload a video, you can't use the Web 2.0 type features that exist elsewhere. Allowing young people to interact between each other brings out really interesting conversations and really useful information that you wouldn't otherwise get. It's in that discussion, that debate and exchange of ideas that really valuable and rich information comes through. (NGO)*

*I think that's (interactive communication) exactly where they're all going, rightly or wrongly. We've done a couple of things in recent years at the Motor Show or the Easter Show, and it very much has to be interactive to engage most people and the young people are very computer literate. So whether it's printing their own number plates through to investigating how many points they'd lose if they did this or that, all of their knowledge is linked very much to computer and IT generated things. (Government)*

*I think it's (websites) one thing that the Government does really badly. We have all these rules and regulations, it's got to be accessible by people using screen readers, the five per cent of the population who use that technology, and it can't be this and it can't be that, and by the time you put all those caveats on there, and it can't be graphics heavy because then it takes people too long to download through dial-up... then you come back to bland and boring and wondering why kids aren't accessing our websites. The ones that work best are when they're hosted by someone else, and they don't look like a Government website and they don't have the same restrictions that we have. (Government)*

One website that seems to have met with support and a favourable response from young people is that established by the Victorian Government through the Department of Planning and Community Development. *Youthcentral* is an online initiative that aims to connect young people, 12–25 years, with local communities and government.

*It does this through a website, training and participation opportunities, and local youth reporters across Victoria...*

*Youthcentral aims to create an accessible and easy to use way for young people to feel a greater sense of connection and be actively involved. Young people contribute to Youthcentral through creative content, multimedia productions, consultation and much more... the website [www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au](http://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au), gives young people access to practical, up-to-date information.' (Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development, 'Youthcentral Much more than a Website...' brochure, p. 2)*

Stakeholders reported considerable success with the *youthcentral* website and its emphasis on gaining youth participation:

*It's (youthcentral) made youth friendly, but it's clearly a government website... viral marketing and email marketing through the email mailing list, hardly any unsubscribe from the mailing list on the site. There's lots of interactive parts of the website... competitions, surveys. The email list nurtures the participative element of the website. (Government)*

*A lot of these programs are about communication with young people...It's always about valuing their effort and their participation in their community...Good, clear communication with them and listening and helping them to plan what they want to do in those places. (Government)*

The emphasis of the Victorian Government initiative is in connecting government to young people by getting them to participate through *youthcentral* and associated programs and other activities. Cooperation through a number of different departments and the integration of a range of policies directed to young people enable many different youth subgroups from different cultural backgrounds and locations (regional and urban), to be involved with the communication. The success of this initiative has been due in part to good relations having been established with a diverse range of groups and organisations both inside and outside government.

#### 4.5.8 Chat rooms and forums

Those in government suggested that web initiatives that involve chat rooms and forums could be very dangerous as government cannot control what goes on, which raises concerns about its role in what is going on. Government can't be seen to be hosting a forum or page where young people are doing the wrong thing. The fear that predatory adults might reach young people through this type of webpage or site was also of concern.

Some stakeholders suggested that public forums and youth ambassadors would appeal only to articulate and confident young people. They considered that such communication means would not appeal to a sufficiently representative cross-section of young people.

*I'm very dubious about youth ambassadors, the selection process always amuses me. You wonder how representative they are. It's a career path for them. They shouldn't pretend they're representing youth. They want to be PM or foreign affairs minister or something. Forums are a gabfest for professional youth advocates. (Music/events stakeholder)*

*Forums are a waste of time. Kids attracted to these things are the articulate ones, often seeking adult approval, school captain types. Those kids are also very good at telling adults what they want to hear. The more valuable research is non-judgmental, open-ended, active research groups, giving young people a chance to speak. (Academic)*

#### 4.6 Message do's and don'ts

Stakeholders put forward a number of 'do's' and 'don'ts' that they felt were relevant to communicating with young people. There was considerable agreement among all stakeholders on most of the suggestions put forward.

##### 4.6.1 Listen to young people

Many stressed that it was important to listen to young people and that listening is a fundamental part of communicating. Avenues mentioned in this regard included formal research approaches and forums; in other words, we should provide young people with opportunities to make their views known, to say what they want more or less of.

*There's a lot said about young people but we don't hear their voices. (Academic)*

*Young people are an extremely, frequently changing demographic in terms of what they respond to, particularly because they've been saturated with mass media and advertising for such a long time and that continually changes and evolves. We would never go out and assume we knew how to communicate with young people unless we'd gone out and asked them the best way to do it. (Government)*

### 4.6.2 Understand your audience

Given the increasing complexity of the young target audience, stakeholders emphasised the critical importance of making efforts to understand the target audience—their needs, attitudes and behaviours—before developing messages aimed at them. The diversity of the young audience makes this virtually a mandatory requirement. Formative developmental research on attitudes, behaviours, issues, interests etc was frequently suggested by stakeholders. Allied to this was the suggestion to pre-test communication strategy and concepts.

*It's important to pre-test all communications because you think you know that based on this, and that, this will apply in these circumstances, but you don't. Sometimes there's less of a desire to test in government because of budget but it's more expensive to produce communication that doesn't work. (Government)*

*Mainstream culture in Australia is a very friendly and welcoming one, but it's set up around a kind of socialisation that involves some drinking, some going out in couples. If you look at some traditional cultures, it doesn't work that way. The going out is the men going out separate to the women, so you get gender-based activities, that the women are not allowed to go to, or the men do not go to... You wouldn't invite someone regularly to your home, that's from a Middle Eastern, or Asian background... the equivalent of that is in a restaurant, there's different socialisations. So while there's some integration... the young people in those groups become very much like the 'Australian' youth, normally around affinity groups, study or work, not so much sport because Australians aspire much more to sport than other cultures do, for other cultures study is more important, to do well and get a good job. In a lot of Asian cultures, study is the most important, to the sacrifice of all other things, including socialisation... so it's very complex. (Researcher)*

*I think it's when that market (young people) takes ownership, when they feel that it is theirs... Whenever the experts or authorities are involved, they talk about everything as if it's theirs. I think that's a seminal mistake. We're all kids once... I think we need to reflect back on our attitude at that time. What we're trying to do is to go to those communities, go into their world and try and find the right ways to get them to want to engage with us. (Music/events stakeholder)*

### 4.6.3 Encourage participation

Stakeholders suggested that young people now expected to be involved in creating communication directed to them.

*All their media is about participation and there's a higher expectation there. It can't just be push, it's got to be pull as well. (Academic)*

*Value young people's voice, value their participation and support them doing those other two things when they're not doing them as often as they might. (Government)*

*Young people create their own media these days and they're used to doing that, so they don't necessarily like being talked at. They want to be involved in the process of, and the development of, the content that's being put out there. It's a much more collaborative environment now when it comes to creating key messages and communicating with people. (Government)*

*Direct youth involvement in the production or the release of communication materials, using competitions, digital media competitions and other kinds of communication processes through which young people are directly involved in; to me that seems like a promising aspect of communication practice among young people. (Academic)*

#### 4.6.4 Content

Stakeholders suggested that content creators should first establish the target audience's attitudes and the context for the communication. They suggested the following approaches to creating content:

- **Be brief:** Young people appreciate a straightforward, brief and to-the-point message.

*They don't want to rifle through piles of information to get to what they need. They want it quickly, they're used to receiving text messages. (NGO)*

*I wonder if we have to be as polite as we once were. Because a lot of their communication is short and to the point through SMS and email, where you don't do a lot of the 'please', 'thank you', 'would you mind'. Should you be more straight to the point in communication because that's what they're used to? But maybe they're used to that in a personal communication but when they're actually receiving it from somewhere else, different rules apply, I don't know. (Government)*

- **Send positive messages:** Much communication from government to young people is negative in nature and tone. Young people would respond more favourably to positive approaches in communication.

*It's about positive messages, position (about health) it as 'let's be the people of tomorrow, let's be a tomorrow person for the community, do it for the future of our culture'; strike a chord with them rather than 'if you don't you'll have a premature death'. (Indigenous stakeholder)*

- **Send aspirational messages:** Allied to a desire for a more positive approach was the suggestion to use a more aspirational tone in communication.

*They like to see themselves not necessarily as they are but as they'll be in a year or two. (NGO)*

*Government messages have a deeply embedded addiction to using shock tactics, despite evidence saying that it's very 60s. They think, 'young people will find this fascinating, they'll want to watch it, they'll say they like it'. And if you ask them to single out which one they thought was best, they'll almost always go with the shock tactic. Will it change their behaviour, will that make them remember the message? Probably not. (NGO)*

*What we're trying to do is allow them to go through experiences in a positive way and to equip them with strategies to help them get through it.' (NGO)*

*Definitely avoiding sending out negative message about youth, like 'I need to tell you this because you are young and stupid'. Young people get frustrated by this, they can't do anything about their age. So tell them what they can do. (NGO)*

- **Check tone:** Allied to the preference for more positive messages was the suggestion to check the tone of the communication. Tonal qualities can influence target audience reactions.

*You wouldn't really want to go with a tone until you've fully tested it and depending on the message and what you're trying to get across...like testing whether you can use humour or not or whether it needs to be more factual.*

*We always try to have a solution involved so that our key message isn't just saying, 'this is scary, this is dangerous, be careful, be aware'; it's more about, 'this is what you can do, here are some alternatives instead of the things you are doing now; Try and give them something they can walk away with and think, 'I can act on that', things that are doable. (NGO)*

- **Check language:** Part of pre-testing is the requirement to check on the audience understanding and appropriateness of the language used.

*Sometimes they don't actually understand what the message might mean, why they're given a message. Some of the basic messages, even though they have them, we don't know if they understand it. There's always scope when trying to give a message, to give a why as well.*

(Government)

*What happens is that in most Australian contemporary advertising, creatives use a lot of word play, they use humour and they use double meaning a lot. That doesn't traverse into cultural groups very well because you can't explain double meanings. With government communication to the youth market, it's very culture based so they're using words and terms that are very much part of the vernacular of the street or the youth culture and that doesn't traverse very well either. My research would say that in advertising to Asian groups, they like fact more than so called creative concepts where it makes you think about what it means. If they're buying a car, they just want to know what they're getting for their money. There's definitely something in that. So, it's not just language that you would have to change, it's about tone, it's got to be a bit more factually based. It's very hard to tweak something that's for the general population and make it work for so many different groups.*

(Researcher)

- **Make images relevant:** Young people react well to relevant visual images.

*It really is making sure that what you're trying to communicate is something they instantly recognise as being something about them and for them. (NGO)*

*Every word you write and every image you put up, it shouldn't be something that has to look good with the crest on it and very approvable by some sub-committee, it has to be something that is going to get a rise out of, or strike a chord with, that demographic. (Indigenous stakeholder)*

- **State what's in it for young people:** Communication has to quickly establish that not only is the communication for young people but that it also has something for them.

*What's in it for them? What are you offering them? Inevitably that's how they'll be viewing the content. (Academic)*

*What you do is you break down those old mass campaigns into what are more niche-targeted, something where there's a take out for them. So it's not just a message, but they get something cool out of it. (Researcher)*

- **Create a strong/conversation approach:** It is a good idea for government to engage in some form of 'communication' with young people, provided it is genuine. Young people are trained to see things in individualistic terms and tend to be issues-based. They would prefer to know who is responsible for certain issues and what that person can offer them in relation to that issue. Personalising the communication as much as possible can make it more meaningful.

*Rather than treating their knowledge of the Government as something abstract, as in 'they should know there are two houses', it's about, 'who has the responsibility for this issue that affects me?' Because they see political landscaping in an issues-based way and the individuals representing issues. (Academic)*

*It's always a conversation. It's not telling them what to do, and it's also a conversation where there's room for listening. (Academic)*

- **Be honest and respectful:** Stakeholders pointed out that young people are good at smelling a fake communication.

*Young people smell a fake, a set-up. They just will. They also smell being told what to do, think, feel, taste. (Music/events stakeholder)*

- **Empower the audience:** It is important to empower young people through the use of technology and to encourage their ownership of the communication/issue.

*It's all because they (young people) have been empowered by technology. If we empower them through the right information and the right opportunities so that it's on their terms in their world. We don't necessarily package it (information) in a way that's in their terms. It's the nature of how a message is put that is real, through a medium like the web. (Music/events stakeholder)*

*The channels through which they access it (information) and how much ownership we want to encourage them to take of it, that's where the technology really comes into play. (Music/events stakeholder)*

- **Aim to have an impact:** Communication directed to young people has to have an impact, but does not necessarily have to 'shock'. Impact can be achieved through 'humour', 'zaniness', 'visuals', 'music', 'dialogue' or a combination of elements.

*Government ads are notoriously boring and have probably become more boring over the last decade. So, do they (young people) take notice of government ads? Probably only the ones that stand out. (Government)*

*If you want to reach them you have to be quite impactful in terms of your method of delivery. They're rather used to people standing up and talking to them about, 'don't talk to everyone you meet online, be careful of the stranger danger'. They're all a bit blasé about it, they've heard it before and they're not really interested in hearing it again, so they're looking for something a bit more impactful. (Government)*

- **Don't be patronising, judgmental or dictatorial:** In keeping with the suggestion of providing young people with the opportunity to participate in developing communication messages and approaches, was the suggestion that the tone of communication should not be authoritarian and the approach should not be judgmental in any way. Again, research was seen as a useful way of checking these issues.

*It's important for government to engage in this technology because that's where young people are. But the kind of rhetoric and the mode of connection has to be very carefully thought through, it's a balancing act, you can't talk down to them, can't pretend that you are not who you are. (Academic)*

*I think, just don't try to talk like a kid. It is so patronising and off-putting and you'll never get it right. (Researcher)*

*Government or corporates who are perceived as authority figures, coming into those domains, they have to do it in ways that are transparent, observant of the ethics of those communities and certainly not in an authoritarian way. (Academic)*

*Research among girls with eating disorders and the assumption is made in the media that it's skinny models that influence them. The big difference was that girls with eating disorders loved to watch cooking shows. When put to young girls (through research), these models aren't skinny by their standards. That (media) is patronising, people don't understand eating disorders. (Academic)*

*It goes back to the point of, 'is the purpose of this campaign to deliver the campaign message, or to engage the kids about this issue?' And it's not about telling young Aboriginal kids how we think they should live their lives to be more acceptable. If you make that mistake you'll get fried. (Indigenous stakeholder)*

- **Don't exaggerate:** Young people are very aware of communication content that exaggerates an issue, circumstance or situation that young people find themselves in. They appreciate factual approaches.

*What young people get is extreme examples in a way that young people don't recognise. They think, 'I went out with my friends on the weekend and we drank and took drugs, and nobody died'. It's pitching it to the most extreme level so that young people can honestly say, 'well that's not me, they're the bad people, and that's not me'. (NGO)*

*Sometimes they've treated young people as if all young people are in crisis or all young people are being led astray...I think that building recognition of young people's agency and the meanings young people themselves give to those issues is critical. (Researcher)*

- **Don't be what you're not:** Young people don't want communicators to pretend to be what they're not.

*I'm an older person now. Never make the mistake of pretending to be one of them. (Music/events stakeholder)*

*It's so obvious when it's not written by a young person for young people, when it's older people trying to be young, it's so obvious. (NGO)*

#### 4.6.5 Endorsement

Stakeholders suggested that appropriate and well-chosen endorsement is very powerful, provided it is an appropriate fit with the issue and is believable. The key is to find the right peer leaders and genuinely engage them. Messages that come from peers or 'people like me' are often well received and can be quite powerful for social marketing campaigns. Young people prefer to hear about peer experiences than be told what to do by an adult.

*It can work better to recruit peer leaders from among young people themselves. I think do your homework, test different approaches. I'm not opposed to a role model approach per se but I think we probably overestimate the positive impact of role models among young people. (Researcher)*

*The old sort of hire Kieren Perkins to tell you about whatever and you know he's getting paid and you know he doesn't give a ###. That sort of stuff doesn't work, it doesn't resonate. I think people see through spokespeople. They only really work if there is truth to their involvement in the issue, a genuine want or care. (Advertising agency)*

*It can be either peer or celebrity but the key spokesperson, particularly if it's a celebrity, needs to have a direct connection with the brand or the message. For instance I think I heard they are going to use Geoff Huegill for binge drinking, right away that strikes me as the wrong person for that particular campaign. But using other young people can work, they are influenced by each other, so peer-to-peer scenarios work quite well. (Advertising agency)*

*You need to find an opinion leader that young people can relate to which can be very difficult. If you can get them to own and distribute the communication or the message themselves that is much more powerful. (NGO)*

Some stakeholders who had used singers and bands to promote social issue messages claimed to have met with considerable success. They spoke of a 'collective endorsement' model where groups of musicians, often representing a variety of music genres, are brought together to promote a social issue. This approach was said to empower young people through their acceptance of the music and the artists chosen. Care has to be taken in the choice of musicians and in establishing their commitment to the issue.

*The artist has got to be comfortable with it, understand what it's all about and be genuinely supportive of it (message). If they're not, if they're a paid mouthpiece we certainly wouldn't use them and the target market would pick it like that. (Music/events stakeholder)*

*There's always a connection that can be found (through music). Whether that connection produces a really successful outcome in terms of the music, what I think it does regardless, it is not always about the end product, it's about the journey. (Music/events stakeholder)*

#### 4.6.6 Use of a third party

Use of a third party as an element in communicating with young people has been found in the commercial world to be effective. So too, in government communication, stakeholders indicated that government messages, when sent through (or with help of) another party are more meaningful and ultimately more effective. Developing partnerships with organisations that already have a relationship with young people overcomes negative associations with government involvement.

*One of the things I've learnt is government spends a lot in buying media. I advocate going into social partnership with youth media outlets. Going to people who are already engaged with young people and who are already trusted. Non-Government bodies. In the National Alcohol Campaign one of the social marketing partners was Sanity Music. We ran competitions through their stores. Video Ezy and MTV, we have partnerships with them as well.'* (Music/events stakeholder)

*The way that they (Youthsafe) can talk to young people, the jargon they can use the lack of rigidity in what we can say and the way we say things in government publications is quite restricting and Youthsafe has that capacity to be a little more 'on the ground level' with young people, in a non-threatening way.* (Government)

*The relationship we have with Youthsafe is a partnership and it is a consensus when things get produced and printed and circulated, it is that we're comfortable with the content as well, but how it physically looks and how it gets out there and how they engage with young people is really something in their domain.* (Government)

*You need to establish good relationships with a diverse range of groups and organisations. If you have any questions regarding a particular group of young people (e.g. indigenous) you can go to them and request (help, advice) and ask what's the best way to get information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth.* (Government)

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## 5. Young people and communication

### 5.1 Influences on the lives of young people

Across all discussion groups, young people's responses were consistent in regard to who they considered were important influences on their lives in terms of providing them with information, guidance and advice, and in helping them with important personal or career decisions. Key influencers were claimed to be parents, peers, teachers/lecturers, workmates and employers. Other sources of influence, such as the media and the internet, were seen as having a more subtle influence, with the internet more likely to be considered a source for information, ideas or entertainment.

#### 5.1.1 Parents

Parents were seen as a particularly important influence in providing a set of values and a moral code and in establishing standards for behaviour. Younger study participants (15–17 years) tended to exhibit a defiant attitude to parental advice, but older participants suggested this rebellious attitude was 'a phase' and claimed that in later years they had a greater understanding of why their parents tried to exercise behavioural restraint. Parental advice was often looked upon as the most trusted and respected advice.

*They (parents) think they know but they don't have a clue. (Male, 15–17 years, Brisbane)*

*If I don't do what they say, I get in trouble.*

*I don't listen to my mum at all. If she tells me not to do something, I do it. (Males, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*They give you information, encouragement, information that's useful. (Male, 15–17 years, Sydney)*

*They are a part of your everyday life. It's how you have been brought up. They make you who you are. (Female, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)*

For older participants (22–24 years), parents were often a 'sounding board' or reference point for helping to solve problems, dilemmas or concerns. Mothers especially were said to play an important role in the lives of young women who have children, providing child minding and much appreciated advice and support on raising children and managing a household. Some maintained mothers are easier to talk to, often more understanding and more forgiving in discussion of life problems; while fathers were said to adopt a more pragmatic approach to both providing information and advice.

*Parents, relatives, they know more people who might be in the areas you're interested in, jobs. They know more about what you have to do and requirements for each job. (Male, 15–17 years, Melbourne)*

*I'll ask my friends for their opinion and some information first because parents are more of an authority figure. But when I know more on the subject, then I will consult my parents. (Female, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*I still listen to everything they (parents) say.*

*Yeah, now we go to them for advice, whereas before we didn't want to hear it. (Females, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*But if I do something bad or wrong, I think, 'what would my parents do or think?' They don't directly affect me but they still do.*

*With family it depends on how much you value their opinion. If you don't then you don't care. I tend to listen more to my friends because if your parents give you advice its 'been there before', but you want to try it out for yourself. You can go the opposite to what they (parents) say, being Generation Y it's a given that you don't listen to everything that your parents tell you to do.*  
(Females, 22–24 years, Sydney)

### 5.1.2 Friends

Peers, and particularly close friends, were also seen by young people in the study as important influences and providers of information. For some young people, having friends—and getting on well with them—is the most important aspect of their lives. Friends tend to dominate their lives. They try to impress their friends who, in turn, try to impress them. The influence of friends is reflected in the adoption of their advice on fashion, music, entertainment and leisure activities, as well as in support on relationship issues. Young people will often turn to friends when they desire advice on a personal, emotional or sensitive issue.

*You share something in common with them (friends) and over time you value their opinion.*  
(Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)

*As you get older you spend less time with your family and more and more time with your friends.*  
(Male, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)

*I try to talk to some of my friends who are a few years older than me, and ask them to tell me how they got their first job and how to look for your own direction. We chat around within our group of friends.* (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)

### 5.1.3 Teachers/lecturers

Teachers or lecturers who were admired were also an important source of advice, particularly for guidance on an education or career choice, and even for help in finding part-time employment. Career advisers were mentioned in this regard; however, the sphere of influence was not limited to them but extended to any teacher or lecturer who was considered sympathetic or empathetic to student needs. Generally, school was considered a positive influence, but some said it could be a barrier to information (e.g. certain websites, even benign ones, are blocked on school computers).

### 5.1.4 Workmates/employers

The influence of the workplace as a source for advice, information and guidance was primarily to do with career and employment choices and directions. This covered a variety of people, such as colleagues at work, mentors at work, and clients and customers. Older study participants (18–24 years) were particularly adamant in their acknowledgement of workmates as a source for information.

*You try and talk to people working there that were students before and that can give you pointers and how to get through the process of getting a job in such companies.*  
(Female, 18–21 years, Sydney)

*At work (law firm) we have RPs and that stands for 'responsible people'. As a young person you get one and they give you feedback on how you're going. Sort of like a mentor.*  
(Female, 22–24 years, Brisbane)

### 5.1.5 Media

There was debate among young people in some groups about the importance of the media as an influence on their lives. Most were more comfortable in discussing the media as a source of entertainment or for leisure-time activity than as a credible means of obtaining information or advice on life matters. The traditional media was seen primarily as a source of entertainment, but also as a possible influence on young people.

While there was often unanimous agreement that various forms of media (and especially the internet, which is growing in influence) are potential information sources, two key attitudes emerged:

- First, some (particularly those over 18 years) were reluctant to admit the media has an influence on their lives and adopted a defensive attitude, maintaining that they were alert to any potential influence, no matter how subtle it was.
- Second, many contended that the media should not or could not be trusted. It was often regarded as manipulative, pervasive and at times unscrupulous in its attempts to influence and as biased in the way it communicates information.

*You have to work out what to believe and what not to believe.*

*You can't believe everything the media portrays in a report or a newspaper.*

*Yeah I think the newspaper's probably worse. (Females, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)*

In discussion on the role of the media in their lives, young people in the study made mention of its influence on fashion, body image, music and trends in general. The rise of the 'culture of the celebrity' and reality TV programs, and the emergence of people who are 'famous for being famous' were also reluctantly mentioned as having a potential influence on them.

*Media does influence you to some extent. I normally look at just the facts from there I don't really look at their opinions. (Female, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*You are taught not to trust the media but it does influence you. But you trust your parents' opinions. (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

TV drama programs that have a 'reality feel' appeared to appeal particularly to young women, although they were often reluctant to admit to their importance or influence on their motivations and aspirations. Programs such as *Brothers and Sisters*, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, and reality programs such as *Biggest Loser*, *Bondi Rescue*, *Border Security*, *Farmer wants a wife*, *Top Model* and 'So you think you can dance' were mentioned in this regard.

*I guess whether you like it or not, the media plays a large role. They show things that we need to aspire to, or they try and make you feel that you need to aspire to, you know like in magazines and on TV. (Male, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*I watch programs that are realistic or close to things in my own life. Something that relates to me but it's usually hyped up.*

*'Skins' is extreme but you start to think that maybe life is like that. (Females, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

Allied to the impact of the media is the influence of 'celebrities and idols', although their potential influence was said to decline with age. They were thought to primarily influence fashion and music; however, there was some evidence to suggest that they could also influence the behaviour of young people.

*Footy players, I go to trainings and talk to them about what you have to do to be a footy player. (Male, 15–17 years, Melbourne)*

*I get influenced by people that are interested in my stuff. I'm into motocross so I like motocross riders and they influence me and stuff. (Male 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*I read this interview with Lilly Allen and she was talking about Twitter. I'm going to have to check it out. Do you know what it is?*

*I don't look up to any celebrities at all, but a lot of young kids do, you know 10–15-year-olds. (Females, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)*

### 5.1.6 Other influences

Other sources of influence mentioned by the young people who took part in the study included church groups, interest and youth groups in general and, to a lesser extent, opinions expressed on internet forums (relating to areas of interest) and blogs.

*I go on forums for things I'm interested in and I like reading other people's opinions.*

*I'm in forums on fish, for aquariums.*

*I like to read blogs on movies. There's often blogs as well, like religious ones and political ones. Thing called Znet. It's a world-wide, left-wing site, articles by Chomsky and the war in Gaza, people were checking up on that. (Males, 22–24 years, LOTE, Sydney)*

## 5.2 Information and entertainment sources

Each of the potential influences detailed above were also seen as potential sources of information. In addition to school and university teachers, key sources of information included family and friends, both of whom were considered trusted avenues for obtaining information, advice, help and support. However, the most frequently mentioned information source was the internet.

### 5.2.1 The internet

The internet was said to be growing in importance as an information source, a vehicle for social networking and a provider of entertainment. It was seen as providing an answer to virtually any question asked of it, and for the most part it was a convenient, fast and trusted source of information. Google and Wikipedia were the most frequently mentioned internet information sites. Some study participants were aware that the information on Wikipedia was not always accurate; others suggested that the existence of the same information on a number of sites indicated the information was valid.

*I Google everything. (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*Wikipedia for information, I think it's 95 per cent accurate. Some people criticise it but they check the IP address and it gets banned if it's wrong information. They monitor it and people that use it want it to be good information. (Males, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*You might not be able to access a lot of the books that you might be able to find at the library but just the fact that you don't have to get up, and take a half an hour tram in, half an hour tram back, waiting for God knows how long, you can just sit at home and pretty well access at least 60 per cent of files from home. (Male, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

Young people use the internet not only for accessing information and downloading music and movies, but also for socialising (social network sites, MSN Messenger and Skype), video sharing (YouTube), retail transactions and banking and keeping up with current affairs via news sites. However, for most, social networking sites and YouTube dominated. There was little or no spontaneous mention of brand, company or organisational websites that were visited. The more attractive websites were said to be those that are constantly changing and evolving. Sites that rarely change are likely to be visited once only.

*You get on MSN and Facebook. I'd spend most time on Facebook. I get on nearly everyday and check Facebook, so I'd probably do half an hour each day.*

*I reckon I'd be on the internet a total of 2 hours a week.*

*Yeah I'd be the same. (Males, 15–17 years, Condobolin)*

*I could pretty much give you my websites—Facebook, YouTube, Google. Another site I use is Justin. TV. It has hundreds of movie channels. That makes up the majority of what I'm doing on the net. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*Pretty much the internet can supplement anything, so it's pretty easy to get lost.*  
(Male, 22–24 years, Melbourne)

*Once you get on the net and get into a conversation you're usually on for a while, you don't realise. It's social networking. Keeping up with family, and friends, particularly overseas, I'm probably spending two maybe three hours a day, you know, downloading music, movies, shows or just talking to your mates. I've also been looking at a lot of YouTube stuff. You can spend hours on there. You start one way and then 'oh cool, that looks good'.* (Males, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)

There was a high level of claimed TV and movie watching via the internet, either through streaming or downloads. Internet access to entertainment was said to offer young people the option of watching what they want, when they want, where they want (often in the privacy of their bedroom).

*The internet for me is huge. That's where I pretty much get everything. I spend a lot more time on the net than I do watching TV.*

*The internet gives you more options; it's not just one source, one opinion. You can go to different sites and compare what they are saying.*

*I'm on the net more (than TV) and I watch most programs on the net as well. I can watch whatever I want that way.* (Males, 18–21 years, Sydney)

*Usually you just download movies and watch movies that way. You can watch them when you want and you don't get bombarded by ads.* (Male, 18–21 years, Coffs Harbour)

*The new popular shows, literally every person, even if I don't watch it, they're all talking about the most recent episode that they've downloaded (from overseas), not the most recent one that's aired on TV, which in Australia is 6 months behind.* (Male, 22–24 years, Melbourne)

### 5.2.2 Television

Television was not always spontaneously mentioned as a source of information. According to most in the study, it provides some information on what is happening in the world through news reports and current affairs programs. References to key issues of the day (health, employment, violence, etc) were often said to be highlighted through media reports and news broadcasts.

Despite the increasing use and influence of the internet, television (both free to air and cable TV) still has a role to play, but primarily as a provider of entertainment rather than as an information source. Drama, comedy programs, music and sport represent the key interest areas on TV for young people.

The young people who mentioned news programs were generally those with an interest in current affairs (particularly those studying the media at university). Those with an interest in news and current affairs were more likely to consult the news online and to frequent websites dedicated to news or websites and forums for specific interest groups. However, the majority of young people in the study showed little interest in news.

*My mornings pretty much run, once I get my breakfast, I actually take my breakfast back to my computer, open 'The Age' click whatever I want to open, multi-tabs, several articles at the same time, sport and whatever as I'm eating my breakfast, I flick through it.* (Male 22–24 years, Melbourne)

Young people, particularly those in the 18–24-year group, appreciate the ability they now have to watch specific programs at a time they choose. Technology and the multi-functionality of many of the technical devices they use (including the option to record programs) enable them to watch what they want when they want. However, some suggested that TV is rapidly becoming 'outdated'. The exception to this general

consideration is live sport programs. Young males in particular, want to view sport live. However, live sport programs are no longer the domain of television only and being able to access them on the internet and through their mobile phones appears to be increasing in its appeal.

*Usually I'll tape it and fast forward the ads, unless I see an ad that I think might be interesting, then I'll rewind it and watch it, but there's no point watching 20 minutes of ads. (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*Generally, I buy a DVD or download rather than be a slave to TV and have to depend on their time.*

*You can use the Fox IQ to record as well. (Males, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

### 5.2.3 Print media

The print media was spontaneously mentioned as a source of information on employment opportunities. However, the internet, through websites such as Seek.com, was said to be increasing in importance in this regard.

Young females in the study were more likely than their male counterparts to claim to read magazines, with some making a distinction between content that is 'trash' and that which entertains or provides 'soft core' information (usually on fashion, food, entertainment). Study participants claimed it is sometimes hard for them to differentiate between gossip content and useful information. Younger girls (15–17 years) mentioned *Dolly* and *Girlfriend*, while older girls mentioned *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Famous*, *NW* and *Who Weekly* and special interest titles made by the older girls in the study.

*I used to read heaps when I was younger but I don't have time anymore.*

*Yeah now it's cookbooks or home magazines. (Females, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)*

Males (particularly younger males) made mention of *Zoo Magazine* and various sports magazines, but generally reading was not a priority for them.

*It's (Zoo) like the man's ultimate magazine, cars, funny jokes and girls all in the one magazine. (Male, 15–17 years, Sydney)*

*Zoo, it's got heaps of chicks and really mad stuff. Things you wouldn't normally see, like bad accidents, mad tattoos, people's injuries, stuff like that. (Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

### 5.2.4 Radio

Radio still has a role to play in the lives of young Australians; however, it too is being challenged by new technologies, most notably the iPod. Radio is still listened to in the morning and used by some as a travelling companion. Music, comedy and gossipy chitchat have primary appeal in this medium.

## 5.3 Young people and traditional forms of communication

### 5.3.1 Face-to-face communication

Communicating face to face is still the main way in which young people communicate with each other and with most people in their daily lives. Face-to-face communication provides an intimacy not matched by technology and is considered particularly important for conversation or dialogue on sensitive, personal and important issues. With face-to-face contact there was thought to be less chance of messages being misunderstood or misinterpreted. Tonal qualities, emphasis and emotion were said to be more easily conveyed through voice and facial or body language when face to face. For more intimate moments it also enables communication through touch.

For many, face-to-face communication is still the most credible and trusted form of communication, primarily because most believe they have a better chance of judging and assessing the reaction of the person they are communicating with.

The disadvantages of face-to-face communication were seen as not always being able to avoid talking to someone you don't want to and not being able to communicate face to face over long distances. A few mentioned the use of cameras when communicating over the internet. To some extent this duplicates a face-to-face situation.

### 5.3.2 Landline telephone

Study participants suggested that use of the landline telephone was declining. This is particularly the case for those living away from the family home and those who may not have a landline connection. Interestingly, the fixed phone is thought of as more for parental use. However, it tends to be a greater consideration for young people when they are in areas without mobile phone coverage and when they are at work (because of the preponderance of landlines in workplaces and because some workplaces discourage the use of mobile phones). Some pointed out that the benefit of the landline telephone is best realised when someone else is paying for its use (e.g. parents or employer). The main disadvantages of landline telephones were that they were immobile and had only one function.

### 5.3.3 Mail

Communicating via letter writing was thought to be virtually non-existent, with SMS or email replacing traditional postal mail as the preferred method for text or written correspondence. In some cases the sending of postcards from overseas may be a consideration but technology was said to have replaced the postcard through the emailing of photographs and the use of social networking through Facebook and MySpace.

Nonetheless, some, notably young females, said it was 'nice to get a letter' and receiving an invitation through the mail had a 'specialness' about it—but for the most part, the immediacy, convenience and ease of sending mass correspondence/invitations by email or social networking sites is the much preferred communication method.

Interestingly, the personal nature of letter writing (and face-to-face communication) was summed up by one young unemployed male who had served some time in gaol:

*I got locked up for a while and when I was inside I found there was no use for a phone and I was just writing letters and I realised how good writing letters was. How personal writing is, to write something and send it to someone. Whereas on the phone (and email) it's not personal, like a robot, and I realised there's nothing in it. If I talk to a girl, online and say, 'let's meet up or something' and they want to chat more on the internet to get to know you. But spend an hour face to face and you would learn a lot more. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

## 5.4 Technology and communication

### 5.4.1 Overview

Young people in the study recognised and acknowledged the importance of communicating and of communication in their daily lives. The advances in technology made in recent years have given increased impetus to the perceived importance of communication and have had a profound effect on the lives of young people. Most claimed to 'not be able to live without a mobile phone', and the computer itself plays an integral part in their lives—at school and university, at home and in the workplace. The computer, and specifically the internet, is rapidly becoming the most important communication source, particularly when in a mobile form.

*Technology is heaps important. Imagine if the internet just disappeared, you'd be stuffed.*

(Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)

*We had a power blackout and, 'oh ####, no computer. I guess I'll go to bed'. Or you can't get your assignment in if your computer crashes. It's all gone. You're dead.* (Female, 22–24 years, Brisbane)

In essence, young people:

- are very aware of the ongoing improvements being made to communication technology, in particular the micronisation of technology
- on a daily basis use some form of technology to communicate
- are increasingly using multi-function devices (i.e. phone/internet) as a source for communication. The mobile phone is not just a phone anymore, it's a mobile computer.

For the most part, young people in the study showed no fear in using technology to communicate on a daily basis. Most have lived their whole lives with communication technology. They embrace it and consider it a fundamental part of their lives. They see themselves as constantly changing and evolving with what they consider to be evolving technology. Multi-tasking and multi-using technology is their modus operandi. It empowers them in virtually all areas of their lives and influences their confidence and self-esteem.

*Technology, it's essential. We'd be lost without it! We're addicted to technology because it allows us to do these simple things when we are out. It makes us feel like our lives are a little easier.*

*It makes us feel important, you know, 'oh I've got a message'.*

*I'd be lost without my phone.* (Females, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)

Young people see technology as a convenient tool that provides them with more communication options. Most young people, unlike some of their parents and grandparents, use technology confidently because it has always been part of their lives. They use communication technology intuitively.

*Technology can be a dividing thing. Older people get confused if the colour of the 'off' button on the remote is green not red. Older people use a different technology and can't use ours.*

*My grandparents call me to put on a video for them. My grandma learned to text but she sends the same text over and over. My Dad sends the same one, he can't change it!* (Males, 15–17 years, Brisbane)

*Everyone uses it (internet). Kids have been brought up on the computer. Like YouTube, everyone uses that now.* (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)

*We grew up with computers. We've been doing homework on computers since grade 7.* (Female, 22–24 years, Brisbane)

Most demonstrated a desire to keep up with trends in communication technology. They are made aware of advances in technology by word of mouth from their peers and through advertising. The benefits of technology were seen to be convenience, immediacy, multi-use capacity, ease of use and flexibility. Technology helps young people live their lives.

Generally, young people had few dislikes about technology. Some maintained they have difficulty keeping up with the trends and that technology moves too fast and can be too complex. The main drawbacks mentioned were gaining access (e.g. no computer in the home, shared computer, access in remote locations) and the cost of the technology (in particular, the prohibitive cost of more sophisticated devices).

*Everything is in this one thing (iPhone) and it's scary. I can't keep up. (Female, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

*I try to stay away from high technology, I try to simplify things. I've got a normal phone not an iPhone...my friend has an iPhone and I've got this piece of crap and I refuse to update it because if you can text and make a call...last night, he's shaking the iPhone and asking 'what will we have for dinner?' (Female, 22–24 years, Brisbane)*

*For me it's a cost thing. If I had an unlimited plan (internet), I would use the internet a lot more for downloading shows and stuff like that. (Male, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

#### 5.4.2 Communicating with each other

Young people in the study frequently commented on their regular use of technology to communicate with their friends. Most claimed to wake up to technology. Many email, text or phone a friend before talking with anyone else in the household. Checking text messages and emails was frequently mentioned as the first thing they do each morning on waking and often the last thing they do before going to sleep at night.

*When I wake up the first thing is the email. I check my emails.*

*I'm just basically messaging my girlfriend as soon as I get up.*

*You call up or message first to say 'hey what are you doing', then you meet up with them later on. (Males, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

Modern technology gives young people instant contact with their peers through a variety of devices. It helps them connect, keep in touch and socialise and it becomes a part of their persona.

*I find emailing has kind of gone out. It's texting or Facebook and MySpace. I would rarely email anyone.*

*Yeah stuff emailing, you get a response in like five hours time. I want it now.*

*I find that I'm pretty much always in a conversation with someone on my phone, always. I'll always have a message on my phone. (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

#### 5.4.3 Communicating with others

The subject matter of the communication and the person with whom they wish to communicate dictates the way young people communicate and the technology (if any) they choose to use:

- The more important, intimate and personal the subject matter, the more likely they will prefer to speak face to face.

*If it's something difficult or you don't know how to say it, you don't want to write it down in case you've written it down incorrectly or the tone or the intention is misinterpreted, especially sarcasm is hard. (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

- They are more likely to convey quick, less personal messages through texting, email or a social networking channel.

*Text is best for up-to-date contact. Who doesn't walk around with a phone on them? Even at work, I have it on silent but you feel it vibrate in your pocket. (Female, 22–24 years, Brisbane)*

*If you need to talk to them immediately I'd phone because they can't ignore you like they can with an email. (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

- They are likely to communicate with parents (and other older adults) face to face or by landline telephone or mobile phone. While some parents are able to successfully text, some young people in the study pointed out that their parents are too slow in their text response or prefer messages in as

few words as possible. The amount and type of contact they have with their parents also influences how they stay in contact with them.

- When involved in more formal forms of communicating (e.g. employment interviews), communication is likely to be face to face or by email (e.g. CVs, initial requests).

*You can reach a broader cross-section if you send your résumé (job application) by email but there's something to be said for calling in. Walk in off the street with your résumé if you know there's a job going there. It shows you're interested a bit more than average. (Male, 22–24 years, Brisbane)*

- In a workplace environment, communication is most likely to be face to face or by phone (fixed or mobile); however, even in this environment some email or text on occasion.

*I find it strange that people in the office will email each other instead of talking. I do it too because that's what everyone does. There's not much face-to-face talking.*

*I'm not an email person I like to talk to people. If it's something difficult and I don't want to confront them with it I will email but if I have to talk to them I will do it over the phone.*

*I think you have people who you always talk to and some you always email.  
(Females, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

Cost considerations also dictate what form of technology is chosen in communicating.

*I don't have a landline. I live on a farm and it would cost \$1500 to get it on, so it's cheaper just to have the mobile. If I had the wires running up to the house I'd have one.  
(Male, 25–30 years, Northam)*

*The internet is good for communicating without running up a big phone bill.  
(Male, 25–30 years, Northam)*

## 5.5 Mobile phones and texting

### 5.5.1 Mobile phones

The mobile phone appeared to be the favourite piece of technology for most of the young participants in the study, particularly as the more sophisticated phones offer multi-function communication capability. Young people use mobile phones from the time they wake up in the morning to the time they go to sleep at night. The mobile phone has become part of the dress code for virtually all young people. They feel uncomfortable and lost without it. The mobile phone, together with social networking, dominates communication for young people. Most consider it a 'catastrophe' if their mobile phone is lost, breaks down or if the service is curtailed as a result of the phone account not being paid.

*If mobiles and computers didn't work, you'd have to write.*

*You'd have to talk to people. (Males, 15–17 years, Sydney)*

*I wouldn't wake up if I couldn't have my mobile. (Female, 15–17 years, Melbourne)*

*[if internet and mobiles didn't work] You'd pinch yourself until the nightmare was over!  
(Female, 15–17 years, Northam)*

*If I walk out one day and realise I've forgotten my mobile phone, I feel very uncomfortable.  
(Female, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*You feel like you're naked, you feel like something is missing. I can't even function without my phone. (Female, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

For most young people, mobile phones have become almost indispensable and benefits them in a number of ways. Mobile phones:

- enable communication anywhere, anytime (provided there is coverage). Users can be in contact and can be contacted all the time.
- are small, convenient, easy to use
- can be status symbols or fashion items or fashion accessories
- enable young people to plan and manage their lives 'on the run'. There is less need to plan ahead.
- are more than just phones. They are also phone books and, depending on the phone and plan, can be linked to the web, email, games, music, information sources, etc.

*You don't plan beforehand, you rely on your phone. (Female, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*It's almost a necessity. Most people are never home all the time. So you have to have some form of communication. You take it wherever you go. (Male, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*I spend most of my day using my mobile phone.*

*I'd be lost without it. (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*For me the (mobile) phone is just the best thing. You've got it 24/7, it's very easy, it's instant access any time you need it. The only annoying thing is when you've got to wait, when other people don't reply straight away. (Male, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

*I use my phone for an alarm, an iPod, phone numbers, maps, notes. I use it for everything, it's easy and compact. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*The internet's becoming bigger on phones. These days your plan comes with say 3 Gig of downloads, so you can get on and get maps, check MSN etc. I think it's going to become much bigger. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*Your phone is your new address book. You take it everywhere and can contact someone anytime.*

*If you want to know something straight away I ring. If I don't care how long it takes I'll text. (Females, 25–30 year, Coffs Harbour)*

*For me it depends whether it's a one sentence answer or a paragraph, then it's easier to call. (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)*

*If you've got more like questions to ask, I'd rather call, because I can't be bothered typing and you can finish it all at once. If I'm bored and bothered, I'll start texting, just to waste time. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*I'll use my phone for texting mostly or calling if I'm in trouble or need someone in a hurry, like the other day when we were getting chased by this group of guys. (Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

Study participants pointed out a number of disadvantages associated with mobile phone use:

- Mobile phone calls can be costly, particularly for those living on a restricted budget.
- Poor mobile coverage is an issue in remote and some rural areas.
- Phones are less suitable for personal or intimate contact than face-to-face contact (e.g. body language can't be read).
- In social settings, using the phone can be seen as anti-social.

- Some young users become too involved or preoccupied with their phone, and exclude face-to-face conversation and contact.
- With technological advances in mobile phones (e.g. Smart phones), some were becoming difficult to use.

*If the mobile phone was any cheaper I'd probably use it more. (Male, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

*Calling is if I really need to do it right then and text is casual, just trying to catch up.*

*Yeah, text is cheap. It's too expensive to call people. It's 20c to text but like \$2 to ring for just a minute, so most of the time you are just texting. (Males, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*We need better phone range, better phone service. Phone service at school would be lovely. (Female, 15–17 years, Northam)*

### 5.5.2 Texting

Many in the study seemed to use their mobiles more for text messaging or SMS, than for phone conversations because SMS:

- costs less than making a phone call. This was of particular importance to young people with prepaid phone plans or limited incomes.
- can be done while involved in another activity (e.g. watching TV, on the internet, hanging out with friends, at the movies, driving a car)
- can be done at times or in situations where conversation might be uncomfortable or inappropriate (e.g. on public transport, at the movies)
- is quick, easy to use, and fun to do
- is informal, often spontaneous and ideal for frequent contact (phone calls were seen as more formal and more official than text)
- is less intimidating than making a phone call for young people who lack confidence
- can be a means of keeping out of trouble (e.g. young people can let parents know where they are without having to talk to them or answer questions from them)
- releases users from boredom and loneliness and enables them to feel secure by keeping in contact
- can be used to receive 'reminder texts' about appointments (e.g. hairdresser, dentist) or progress reports from service providers (e.g. updates on repairs to laptop)
- is a convenient method for entering competitions, especially those conducted by entertainment providers (e.g. MTV).

*I guess it also depends on what you are doing at the time. You can be doing other things and message people. You can't do that if you call and talk to someone.*

*It depends what you feel like as well. Sometimes I just don't feel like sustaining a conversation, so I will text. (Males, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*It only costs me a cent to send a text, so I do that if I can. (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)*

*If I don't like them or don't want to talk to them I send them an email.*

*I sometimes SMS my parents, but I usually find I have to call them straight after to see if they got it, which kind of defeats the purpose. (Females, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*I get at least a hundred emails a day. And a lot of them are immediate response, it could be a 2 line answer. (Male, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

*Texting is heaps cheaper and you can be doing something else while you are doing it. (Male, 25–30 years, Northam)*

*I often just text because I'm bored, you know waiting for the bus, sitting at home on the computer or doing homework. (Female, 15–17 years, Perth)*

*I text friends if I'm bored, 'hi, how are you?' or if I need to ask about a class and stuff. I only stop texting when I'm out of credit. Mum pays for the phone. (Female, 15–17 years, Brisbane)*

The disadvantages of using SMS to communicate were seen as follows:

- SMS is less suitable than a mobile phone call for responding to urgent messages.
- SMS is less suitable for conveying messages of a personal, sensitive or intimate nature, which are better conveyed in face-to-face conversation.
- Text messages (like emails) can be misinterpreted.
- Certain messages sent by SMS (or email) would not be spoken in a face-to-face situation (this point was made by some young women).
- Unwanted texts can be received from companies promoting or selling services or products, including upgrades (e.g. *recharge now, you have a message, check your email, incorrect advice that you are behind on rent, people trying to rip you off, hassled by nightclub promoters*). While there is a 'stop text' function, it was claimed that it cannot always be relied on to stop unwanted text messages.

*It's better to say it face to face, you can express and explain things (better)... You do read a lot more into things (on email)... It's a computer, not personal, you're not looking into a face... can't get the tone that can give the true meaning... unless you put it in caps and then people think that you are shouting at them. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*You can't relay your emotions properly through technology. Even on a phone, your voice might change but you can't tell it all. The most effective way is face to face. Something really important to say you can't do it properly over Facebook or email... But I have to point out that those situations are not that often. Usually it's short messages. (Male, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*Sometimes face to face is clearer. No matter how many smiley faces you put on your message you can get the non-verbal things if you go face to face. You've got to send 2 or 3 texts if it's a long message and text can be misunderstood, especially if there's too much abbreviation. (Female, 22–24 years, Toowoomba)*

*Boys can con you into saying or doing things that you wouldn't do if face to face, because you are in the privacy of your own room. You think it's private. They can copy or record what you've said and show it around school.*

*People think they can hide behind a screen but you wouldn't say the things in real life. (Females, 15–17 years, Melbourne)*

### 5.5.3 Text language

The convenience and speed of SMS and the dexterity and enthusiasm with which young people have utilised and adopted this method of communicating has created a new language which is part shortened English and part code. Some young people were concerned about the use of the abbreviated form of English often used when texting; others accepted it and maintained that shortened words and coded expressions simply facilitate the speed with which they can communicate. It meets their needs.

Some in the study mentioned that they or their friends had used the shortened English text language when writing more formal communication (job applications, school essays). This had not been acceptable to the potential employer or the school concerned, but they freely admitted to not knowing how to use more formal written communication.

Others accepted the use of this short, coded form of language as indicative of a culture change, with the evolving nature of text for SMS, and to a lesser extent email, in keeping with the convenience and speed of communication now possible through the use of technology.

*SMS talk is like a new form of expression that enables you to express certain things but you shouldn't just use that, you lose subtlety of language. There's room for both. (Male, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

*Some people say LOL when talking but that's crazy, you're not actually laughing out loud but they use it as language... People a lot younger than us tend to use it. It's like BRB (be right back).*

*Like my teacher said, 'that's grouse' but that didn't mean anything to me, but it's just language, just like LOL. It's like 'radical', 'cowabunga', 'cool', 'sweet'. You get a lot of young people using pig latin too. It's language use, that's now the culture. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*Our age group knows it's not the right language (English) but the younger age group going for jobs use the shortened language. One of my friends showed me his essay and it was in the shortened language. He thought it looked cool.*

*I see the SMS language as an evolution of English. Like it's shortened words but you still know what they mean.*

*In the right context it's ok. I'm starting to use the shortened words in my emails. It's convenience more than anything. (Males, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

*My boyfriend's sister is 19 and I don't understand a word she says though there's only four year's difference between us. That generation uses different words, like there are 19-year-olds in my office who walk around saying things like 'hi slapper!' They think that's cute and funny. (Female, 22–24 years, Brisbane)*

## 5.6 Communicating via the internet

### 5.6.1 Email

Use of email was widespread among young people in the study, particularly those over 18 years and those who use a computer as part of their job. Email has replaced letter writing and was used both as a formal communication (as part of a job role or when applying for employment) and in a more informal way when emailing socially to friends. However, as a method of communication it was not generally considered as informal as SMS.

Email was said to be used for:

- conveying lengthy messages
- dispatching university assignments
- making more serious communications (either formal or informal)
- applying for jobs and sending CVs.

Email was seen as having the advantages of convenience, speed of communication and instantaneity (particularly when used from a mobile device—iPhone). Additionally, the ability to attach files and documents to messages was seen as an advantage. While young people still use email to chat to friends, their use of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace is increasing.

One shortcoming of email was perceived to be the difficulty in conveying sentiment and emotion, with the use of irony and sarcasm often misunderstood or misinterpreted. Other criticisms related to receiving unwanted emails and ‘spams’.

*If you try and send something serious they'll get what you're saying but they don't get the feeling.*  
(Female, 18–21 years, Sydney)

### 5.6.2 Social networking

Young people across all locations in this study maintained that they spend considerable time on social networking sites and using MSN Messenger to communicate. They use social networking sites with the same confidence they use all forms of communication technology. Many claimed to spend one to two hours a day, usually of an evening, communicating through these mediums. The sites provide the opportunity for real-time discussions, while also allowing users the opportunity to explore and learn more about others and show others more about themselves.

The internet tends to allow young people to communicate on a different level from that of the telephone and mobile phone. Group participants claimed that through these tools they can engage in a group conversation or hold three or four conversations at the one time. As is the case with SMS, these technologies provide young people with the opportunity to multi-task.

*I've got my laptop on, mobile, SMS, watching TV, listening to music, about five things at once.*  
(Male, 15–17 years, Sydney)

*MSN is great, you can chat with people while you are doing your homework, you know it just beeps when a message comes in so you take a look at it and send something back.* (Female, 15–17 years, Perth)

*You can do other stuff, you can talk to heaps of people, and you don't have to worry if you don't have anything to say.*

*Yeah no worries about awkward silences!* (Males, 15–17 years, Condobolin)

*You normally start with one person but it ends up with 5 or 6 more people in the conversation.*  
(Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)

*I'm on the MSN quite a lot. Even if I'm doing other stuff, I'm kind of always online. You can watch stuff on your bed on the laptop. It's easy to skip from one thing to another.* (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)

Interestingly, among the young participants in the study there appeared to be a distinct migration (or natural progression) from MySpace to Facebook with age. Those aged 15–17 years seemed to be the only consistent users of MySpace. Some older participants described MySpace as ‘very teenie-bopper’ and ‘very American’; Facebook was looked upon as more mature and more about communication and keeping in touch, compared to what was seen as the ‘self-promotion’ approach of MySpace. The choice of a social networking channel appears to depend on what the peer group uses.

*MySpace, we're all in MySpace, not Facebook. Facebook is older people, you'd probably see your teachers on there.* (Female, 15–17 years, Perth)

*We're all on MySpace, not Facebook that's heaps older people.* (Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)

*You grow out of MySpace too. Facebook is the latest, it's more grown up than MSN and MySpace.* (Female, 22–24 years, Brisbane)

*MySpace seems a bit teenie-bopper. If you've seen the way some people have set theirs up, it's like 'Oh my God' are we back to kindergarten.*

*Facebook's more personal. It's not as 'look at me!' as MySpace.* (Females, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)

Social networking sites were seen as having a number of benefits:

- They provide a convenient means of keeping in contact with friends (both current and past).
- They are an ideal method for keeping in contact with friends overseas and, when overseas for keeping in contact with family and friends at home. For many, social networking sites have replaced the postcard because of the speed of communication they offer and because photographs can be posted on them. They are often better than the phone or email for informal social contact and chitchat. They are particularly conducive to social networking because of their invitational tone and format and the ability to include photos.
- They provide an ideal opportunity to meet members of the opposite sex.
- Most importantly, the use of social networking sites (such as Facebook) and the sharing of experiences enables young people to have or create an identity. Like most new technology, social networking empowers young people, gives confidence and raises self-esteem. This is recognised and acknowledged by them.
- The use of a social networking site relieves boredom.
- In essence, social networking sites extend the ways in which young people socialise and provide them with an opportunity to project their personality.

*I like Facebook because it allows you to have photos of your friends because I don't take photos. You can see what's new with people, socially you can see how or what they've changed. You can keep in touch with everyone instantly, you can send out invitations.* (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)

*Facebook is good for keeping up with mates overseas and finding out what people are doing without actually talking to them. I don't know why I do that, but I do.*

*I find I've found a lot of old friends on there, you know, those that have moved to Perth or somewhere else.* (Males, 25–30 years, Northam)

*[MySpace and MSN for communication] it's free and you can put photos up there or look at other people's photos, so they're not just telling you about a party or something you can see the photos, see what, or who, they are talking about.* (Female, 15–17 years, Perth)

*Mine [friends on Facebook] tend to be more distant because I come from Sydney, so it's a way of keeping in contact with those guys.* (Male, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)

*Usually catching up with old mates who have left.*

*Yeah or chatting with friends who are away.*

*Or in your case, chasing women!* (Males, 22–30 years, Condobolin)

*You begin to know more people.*

*You sort of meet them in a way, but not in real life. You can organise to meet them and stuff.*

*You use it to show what your personality is like. You put up pictures that you like, music.*

(Males, 15–17 years, Melbourne)

*It plays to your ego as well, as you have your own profile and your photos. Makes you feel good, it's me on the internet.* (Male, 18–21 years, Melbourne)

*With my closer friends it's generally pretty much phone, and Facebook is largely for people I might not see very often.*

*The culture of our generation has changed, where I'll normally click 'attending' on Facebook and that's the equivalent of my RSVP. I'd never actually call them up.*

(Males, 22–24 years, Melbourne)

The negatives of social networking sites included the following:

- privacy and security issues:
  - concern about hackers and employers gaining access to your social network page
  - embarrassing photos of users 'put up' by others
  - concern about loss of privacy through 'tagging'
  - loss of some control over personal information
  - concern over the rules of privacy; some users appear very aware of the rules, others are not
  - claims that one provider was encouraging them to not go private and 'get more friends'
- lack of internet or slow service, particularly in more remote locations
- potential for some users to become 'addicted' in their use of social networks and spend 'too much time' on social networking to the detriment of other areas of their lives (e.g. homework, study, face-to-face social interaction)
- potential for some users to take their involvement with the site 'too far' and say things (or post messages) they would not normally convey to people
- loss of personal intimacy and physical contact, as well as the notion of friends being stretched too far (allied to this was criticism of the attempt by people who the user does not want as a friend to become a friend)
- advertising by companies and organisations; young people often regarded this as an invasion of their personal space.

*Everyone aged 15 used MySpace but changed when I was 18 because people think they can say things that they wouldn't say to your face, causes too many troubles.* (Female, 18–21 years, Sydney)

*Anybody can talk to you. You're not reaching out. You lose a bit of control. People can still look at your stuff. You have to make sure you screen everything. Bosses can look up your private life on weekends.*

*There's consequences and limitations that you don't realise. Like there was this girl at school who someone put a video on and she said 'please take it down'. A friend put it up and she did not have control over it.* (Females, 18–21 years, Sydney)

*It's scary when you're out and people say they know you and then you realise it's from seeing photos of you on a friend's Facebook page.* (Female, 22–24 years, Melbourne)

*My girlfriend lives out of Toowoomba and the Net access on the satellite is so crappy she couldn't even put in her job application. She had to go into town with it. (Male, 22–24 years, Brisbane)*

*People say once you've got it you spend too much time on it. That's why I won't get it and I'm on a computer all day at work too.*

*I'm going to have to ban myself from Facebook, have Facebook-free days. (Females, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*I think it can get a bit addictive and people are online all day.*

*It doesn't make up for the physical interaction.*

*If it's posted on Facebook it's up for everybody to see. (Males, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*Sometimes you feel out of the loop, but if they're your real friends, you see them face to face anyway. (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*The bad thing is that Facebook is changing the way people socialise. So instead of a face-to-face thing, it's impersonal. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*You're careful what you put out there.*

*You don't have private conversations on My Space. (Females, 22–24 years, Brisbane)*

*Facebook is a better version of MySpace...but after that, you get a life?*

*You have to put up with ads on Facebook's side panel. (Females, 22–24 years, Brisbane)*

*I used to love MySpace. It was beautiful. I built it. I hate it now. It's full of ads and rubbish and idiots trying to sell you things, model agencies trying to contact you even if you have no interest in that. (Female, 22–24 years, Brisbane)*

### 5.6.3 Other elements of technology

Chat rooms, forums and YouTube were all mentioned by study participants. These social media were primarily used for entertainment or as a means of procuring information. Through these various avenues, those with interests, hobbies or a need for information (university and school students) can access the opinions of others with similar interests or enter into dialogue with them. Blogging was also mentioned in a similar fashion.

Internet telephony (e.g. Skype) and video conferencing were mentioned as other ways of communicating over the internet. However, awareness of these mediums was generally limited to those who have friends or family overseas. Internet telephony was seen as offering a less expensive way to keep in contact than phone; video conferencing was seen more as a form of communication for a job or occupation.

*I live in a share house with 12 people and they all use Skype to communicate with people overseas. They're all different nationalities. You walk through the house and there's four to five conversations going on at once. (Male, 22–24 years, Brisbane)*

Twitter was mentioned by some in the study as the newest form of social networking and had received considerable publicity at the time of the study. In general, study participants were less familiar with the most recent entrant to the social networking arena. Initial reaction focused on the publicity of Twitter by celebrities and the belief it was a less substantial means of networking than Facebook or MySpace. Nonetheless, some interest in it had been generated by the publicity and many claimed they intended to seek more information on it.

## 5.7 Communicating with young people

### 5.7.1 Segmentation

Study participants acknowledged that the population of young people is not homogeneous. They saw the young population as being made up of a number of different subgroups, which shared some things, but not others. Age, gender and a culturally and linguistically diverse background were spontaneously nominated as factors that reflect differences between young people, with life experiences, lifestyle, education, and socioeconomic circumstances also thought to influence attitudes, behaviours and the circumstances in which they find themselves.

Study participants spoke of life stages and lifestyles as particularly important variables regarding attitudes, behaviours, tastes and interests. There was some reference made to subgroups with various lifestyles, including, 'goths', 'emos', 'punks', 'try hard metros', and so on.

*I wouldn't actually go boys and girls so much, the biggest trend for our age group at the moment is metrosexuals for males and tomboys for girls, so I'd actually say that you'd go boys and tomboys and girls and metrosexuals. Make-up these days applies to males as well. (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*Think it's too hard especially in this age group...people are just so different...especially at this age, people are quite pretentious about what music they listen to, or dress in a certain way...I guess you grow out of it. (Female, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

*It's not only geographic, but it's lifestyle as well, and obviously communication as well, because they must have obstacles like access to the internet, it's easier for us (people in city) to communicate.*

*It's also the need, like they (people in country) don't have the need to email everyone. (Females, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

Other ways of segmenting young people suggested by those who took part in the study included:

- those at school vs those not at school
- those at university vs those not at university
- by outside interests, hobbies, etc
- employment status
- relationship status (single/married or partnered)
- geographic location (urban/rural).

However, the major subgrouping mentioned was under and over 18-years-of-age (reaching adulthood at 18, symbolised by legal age to drink, drive and vote). Other frequently nominated age splits, with life stage/lifestyle included:

- 12–14 years—first years in high school, the onset of puberty
- 15–17 years—final years of school, major exams, decisions on future/career
- 18–24 years—establishing career, further education.

Some in the study spoke of a transition period (18–24 years) between leaving school and taking up employment. This period was taken up with further education, overseas travel or time spent in part-time employment—working out what they wanted to do with their lives. Many said it was during this time that they needed advice, support, help and information on what to do with their lives. Many were unaware of what services are available and felt there was a paucity of services at this time. They relied on the internet and word of mouth from friends on where to obtain information and advice on planning their lives.

*I'd love to do face to face, but very rarely I find someone who can give me the information that I want, so that's why I use the net and hope for the best. They seem to forget that we exist most of the time. We're sort of these in-betweens. (Female, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*I find I use the internet, because I find there's not a lot of services around for our age group, they target the younger ones who are just finishing school and there's this huge gap, where it's assumed we're just going to get jobs straight away or we're not worth it or we're not looking...that's from the job side of things, there just seems to be a huge gap. We have to research ourselves, using the internet. (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

There was no overall agreement about the best channel for communicating to the various subgroups within the population of young people. However, it was generally felt that communicating with those at school through school is still a potentially effective method of reaching young people aged 12–17 years.

Communication mediums generally were thought likely to cut across the various subgroups. In this regard, TV, billboards, and the internet were mentioned. However, the content of the message and, importantly, the way in which it is creatively executed was generally considered a more important issue than the medium chosen. To obtain maximum effectiveness, messages need to be tailored to the specific subgroups and, in so doing, execution qualities may vary. Given this finding, it would seem that pre-testing of communication directed to young people is a desirable element.

### 5.7.2 Communication directed to young people

Young people in the study were very much aware that they are often the target for advertising and communication from corporate, commercial groups, governments and non-commercial organisations. Some said they were inundated with advertising on TV, radio, in magazines, on public transport, billboards, posters, the internet and increasingly via their mobile phones.

Study participants were quick to point out what style of advertising and communication they do not like and what they consider to be ineffective in communicating with them:

- spruikers who approach them in the street trying to sell them something
- communication that is patronising, condescending or authoritarian
- advertising that 'tries to be cool', 'tries to be young', but to them obviously is not
- communication that does not entertain or attempt to involve a young audience
- pop-ups, advertising intruding into their internet screen, particularly on their social networking sites.

*I hate being bothered in the street. I've been to the city a couple of times in the last few weeks and every time there's people offering their deals.*

*Yeah, sometimes I take my mobile phone and pretend I'm talking on the phone. (Females, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*Every now and then you'll navigate to a page and an ad will pop up and cover the contents that you are trying to read. The first thing I will do is look for the close button. I won't even read it.*

*The worst ones are those pop ups that take most of the screen and you can't stop them straight away. They're really loud and in your face. They're usually car ads. (Male, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*I've made a conscious effort to stop the bombardment of messages. I've opted out of a lot of things so I don't get offers anymore. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*I don't like it when companies try to be something they're not, like they're trying to be hip but it's quite evident that they're not. (Female, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

Advertising that was considered effective for their age group (15–24 years) ranged from fast food advertising (e.g. KFC, Pepsi Max) through service/internet providers (e.g. Vodafone, Virgin, Apple) to advertising for alcoholic beverages (e.g. Bundy, Pure Blonde, alcohol advertising in general).

*That deodorant ad is good. It's funny. You know the one with the guy spraying everyone. It's saying that chicks won't be attracted to you if you sweat a lot. (Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*Something fun—those Pepsi ads you know where the guy's at the job interview and the other one with the guy who fights the Octopus, they're funny. (Female, 15–17 years, Perth)*

*The Pepsi ad where he throws himself out the door, that's good. It's funny and clever. And the one where he's talking to the chick and rescues his mate from the octopus. (Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*I find that they (Virgin) connect with our target group pretty well.*

*You don't have to ring up to find out more information, it's all there. So it's not wasting your time and it's not wasting their time.*

*You can actually read it and understand it. (Females, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*I think the way they do it, it's directed to an audience that thinks that's cool I want that.*

*It's (Apple) instantly recognisable. Trendy, hipster. People who want to be up to date or have the right stuff. They want to have it. (Males, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*The language they (Virgin) use is more for young people. Has funny stuff. The way they communicate is aimed at us (age group). (Male, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

Interestingly, some young males in the study mentioned advertising directed to them on Xbox video games. Advertising for president-elect Barack Obama appeared on billboards depicted on the race track of a car race game (Burn Out Paradise). They accepted this form of advertising because it added realism to the game, with the depiction of advertising billboards in the video game in the same way that they appear on actual race tracks. It also, in their view, bolstered the image of Barack Obama.

*They are starting in-game advertising. Obama had ads on the game before the election. So while you are driving (in the game) you can see the ad on the billboard as you go by. That generally targets the 18–39-year-olds because they are moving away from TV because they can get everything online...TV, shows, movies and games.*

*He was the first President to do it. By 2010 they're expecting to get \$6 billion in advertising from in-game advertising. (Males, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

Communication that appealed to them was often 'outside of the box', 'humorous', often 'zany'. Importantly it entertained and engaged them and encouraged their participation. Other key ingredients mentioned by study participants included:

- music, which was often a key element
- colour, strong visuals
- people and situations with whom they can identify
- simple, clean, uncluttered advertising
- honest and straightforward approach
- not patronising or condescending

- not authoritarian
- simple language
- brief and to the point.

Word-of-mouth recommendation and testimonial approaches also had some appeal.

*If they've got music to fit what they're trying to get across, it's even more powerful than just the message itself. (Female, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

*That Top Gear take off of the 'Pinkie ad', now that's funny, it's smart and clever. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*These days they have to be extravagant, big and crazy to get our attention otherwise we take no notice, just switch off. (Male, 25–30 years, Northam)*

*It's got to be simple, short, quick and clever, or quirky, you know different. (Male, 22–24 years, Perth)*

*My idea of good communication that appeals to people our age is visualisation, vibrant colours, modern taste, artistic flavour and taste, modern culture, society and lifestyle, architecture, fashion and music. (Male, 15–17 years, Melbourne)*

*Everyone's different, but I think the majority of girls like colour and girly sort of stuff.*

*Not too many words. If you're going to have words, have them in a cool font.*

*Yeah minimal words, you don't want to have to read to get the ad if it's in a magazine. (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

*Don't treat us like idiots.*

*Yeah, and I hate being lectured too. It's the quickest way to turn me off. (Females, 18–21 years, Perth)*

*I think it's good on an ad, whether it's on TV, Radio or someone handing you a flyer on the street. I think it's good in any form when it has somewhere in it where you can go to find out more information, providing you with the pathway. It's really frustrating when you've been given something and you only have the company name and can't find the website. (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*We are a generation who only pick up on something that we are interested in. We are not going to be sold something we are not interested in. We're a generation that is switched off unless it's something we are interested in. (Male, 18–21 years, Melbourne)*

*Those funny, thinking outside of the box ads are fascinating for our generation, rather than straight out tell us your product is good.*

*They've got that 'you create an ad', that got me intrigued. Straight away I'm thinking, 'what would I do?' and I'm thinking of the product. (Males, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

*I think it's just referrals, friends. It's been around a long time but it still works, friends refer friends.*

*Because people our age are influenced greatly by our friends and you trust them more. (Females, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*Government is two-faced and business is pushing their product so they only tell you what you want to hear. That's why it comes back to people who have tried a product, you value their opinion more. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

## 6. The government and young people

### 6.1 Who is the government?

Most of the young people in the study were largely ignorant of the processes of government and displayed little interest in government. There was a vague awareness of the three levels of government (federal, state, and local) with the level of understanding increasing with age and education (it was much higher among those who were university educated).

However, overall the young people who took part in this study had a poor knowledge of the government. Most were unable to comment on or were confused about the responsibilities of the three levels of government, although many associated garbage collection and their local council with local government and the local community. There were varying knowledge levels of the roles of state and federal governments. Indeed, some did not know the name of their state's Premier and many were under the impression that there was a hierarchical link between the three levels of government, with the federal government generally considered to be the main form of government and the most important.

*The local government looks after household things, garbage, council stuff. State government things for the state, desalination plants, I think they pass ideas on through to the federal government.*

(Female, 15–17 years, Melbourne)

*Canberra is the proper government, NSW Government is a branch of the federal government.*

(Male, 15–17 years, Sydney)

*I don't know who's responsible for what, but when transport (buses and trains) is not in your favour, you blame the Government.*

(Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)

*They (the federal government) tell the state government what to do, then the state government tells us what to do. It's like a big food chain sort of thing.*

(Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)

*(Premier of NSW) Is it that Costello guy?*

*Did it used to be Bob Carr?*

*Don't know and actually I don't really care.*

(Females, 18–21 years, Condobolin)

*So does stuff from the NSW Government have to go through federal?*

(Female, 18–21 years, Condobolin)

*For politics I have to ask an older person what's going on. I know the Prime Minister and stuff like that from school but other than that I don't know who's who and what's what. Everything is just muddled and jumbled and it doesn't make sense to me so I prefer to say 'hey, what's going on? Tell me in plain English who do I vote for?'*

(Female, 22–24 years, Toowoomba)

The federal government tended to have the highest profile for most study participants. This was in part because participants associated the federal government with what they perceived to be important and major issues (e.g. foreign affairs, taxation and employment) and in part because they recognised Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister and linked this position to the federal government. Although there was strong awareness of Kevin Rudd as the current Prime Minister there was not a great deal of knowledge about him or the government's policies. (There was, however, strong awareness of the recent announcement, at the time of the study, of the Government's stimulus package).

Prime Minister Rudd's website, his appearance on *Rove Live* and his 'sorry' statement were mentioned favourably by a few. He was seen as potentially approachable and attempting to relate with the population; however, his profile was no match for US President Obama who, for many in the study, has achieved a celebrity status.

*Yeah, this month they're giving us \$900. Honestly when I think about the federal government the only thing is the \$900. (Male, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*I think you'd find more people talking about American politics because of Obama, more than Bill Clinton in the past and whether that's because he appeals more to the youth, or whether it's the media coverage, it's in your face, I'm not sure. I don't think Rudd did that as much.*

*Some of it might have been that you liked Kevin Rudd and some of his policies, and some of it might have been it's just there and you're going to add him as your Facebook friend. At the same time, you're knowing his name and you're probably more likely to vote for him than John Howard who wasn't on Facebook. (Males, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

*Barack Obama used YouTube... he's cool, he's honest. But you don't have to be cool to use YouTube. They (Government) should work on that, at least try that. (Male, 18–21 years, Toowoomba)*

While there was a general appreciation that more serious issues were the responsibility of the federal government, there was no significant knowledge of individual departments and only little knowledge of government services. In general, the young study participants tended to think of issues rather than government departments and their relevant responsibilities. The exception tended to be for those who had some form of direct involvement with a particular government department or agency (e.g. youth allowance with Centrelink, residency or citizenship with the Department of Immigration).

In regard to associating individual messages with specific departments, sometimes the more obvious issues/messages were linked to certain departments (e.g. anti-drugs with the Department of Health; road safety with RTA/TAC/Qld Transport; Army, Navy, Air Force advertising with the Department of Defence). Some maintained that the inclusion of the government imprimatur at the end of TV commercials conveying an initiative of the Australian Government (if it could be heard) lessened any association with an individual department.

All in all, the message was more important to many of the study participants than identifying the source.

*I had to deal with the department of education and the workplace (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) in a thing and I can appreciate that for everything there's a big portfolio and a big team of people working on things. (Female, 22–24 years, unemployed, Sydney)*

*I think of government being up there rather than an actual department. (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

## 6.2 Politicians

Mention of the term 'government' often elicited comments about politicians. Politicians were closely and strongly linked to any discussion about government. However, this was invariably an unfavourable association, with the image most participants in the study had of politicians being strongly negative. A variety of derogatory terms were used in reference to politicians (e.g. 'old people arguing', 'abusive', 'boring', 'greedy fraudsters' and 'irrelevant').

Young people in the study doubted the integrity, sincerity and truthfulness of most politicians. The system of government and opposition was often criticised for encouraging both sides to be overly critical of each other. Other criticisms were that the parties could not seem to reach consensus on major issues and that it appeared they were only interested in attacking each other and not working together for the good of the Australian community.

*They screw us over. It doesn't matter who you choose they all screw you over.' (Male, 15–17 years, Sydney)*

*It depends on what message the Government want to send. They can end up looking foolish, like Anna Bligh and the beached whale, Kevin Rudd and the swearing was that an accident or, did he do it on purpose, a strategic thing to relate to people.*

*In the elections, nothing is less appealing to me than dissing the Opposition. If only they could just state their policies in simple terms and let that be it. It's like they bring up things people said five to six years ago. They think we're that stupid that we believe it. (Females, 22–24 years, Brisbane)*

*Politicians, they just try and make everything sound good. (Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*They fix up the road then six weeks later it rains and it's #####ed again. They are only interested in a cheap fix, make it look good so they get votes and get in again. (Male, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*Old guys in suits with grey balding hair, laws, policies. Talking about stuff we don't understand.*

*Yeah, gibberish. Boring economics and stuff like that. Boring!*

*Yeah, bland and boring! (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

*You feel like you can't trust any of them, they're all the same. They all make snide remarks about each other. LNP say they will cut classes and that affects me as a teacher but Anna Bligh is building a football stadium instead of a hospital so I go 'well, she's dodgy and she's good' but I don't know enough about it to go 'that's who I'll vote for, for sure'. (Female, 22–24 years, Toowoomba)*

The association made by young people of government with politicians (and elections) was particularly strong. Unfortunately, for many, the 'government' tended to be tainted with the same brush that was applied to politicians. Politicians and government were therefore largely seen as self-serving, lacking genuine conviction and only willing to fulfil promises when it is to their advantage, irrespective of any potential good to the community or even to specific sections of the community.

*At the end of the day, they all say one thing and do another. (Female, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*Politicians, you can't trust them. They don't follow up on promises and they do whatever will keep them there. (Female, 15–17 years, Perth)*

*They are two-faced.*

*They're always saying what's right at the time. It just depends what people are thinking at the time. They can be on one side one day, then when they realise they are in a bad light they change sides. (Males, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

### 6.3 Relevance of government

On initial consideration, most young people in the study believed government was not all that relevant to them at this stage in their lives. The government is not something most young people think about. If anything it tends to be regarded as lacking in any immediate relevance, although it was acknowledged that some young people have an interest in government and politics (i.e. university students or those interested in a career in politics).

*I think a lot of people 18–21 are pretty ignorant when it comes to government issues. They're just not interested. So even if there was a survey or something (forum), they probably wouldn't go.*

*The majority wouldn't be bothered. The only ones that would be are probably the ones that are really interested anyway, like most of my law cohorts who have a firm opinion on things anyway. (Females, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*I don't really see a connection. I don't think about it in anyway. So I don't think they communicate to me. I mostly think of it as politics, which is irrelevant to me. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*'Anything that comes on the tele about the Government I just switch off or switch over.*

*From one Prime Minister to another, they don't do anything different. It's all crap.*  
(Female, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)

*It wouldn't even be 10 per cent relevant.*

*Yeah, I don't think it's much more than that. It doesn't seem to change no matter who is in.*

*It's all based on the same principles—tell you a lot and give you a small amount of those things at the end of the day. Only give you enough so that they can get re-elected.*  
(Males, 25–30 years, Northam)

*I come from Iran and I'm interested in Foreign relations but they (politicians) are not going to do anything. It's never going to change because of America.* (Female, LOTE, 18–21 years, Sydney)

Some young participants pointed out that the government will probably be more relevant to them when they are older and have settled down with a family and, as a consequence, will have a more obvious need for government support or knowledge about the process of government. Then they may take a greater interest in government and its relevance to their lives. Others doubted they would ever be interested in government or politics. They thought this was in part due to never being taught about government or told sufficiently how government is involved in their lives. Their claimed ignorance of government and its relevance to their lives is a significant barrier to their involvement in government.

*It's not really all that relevant to us, maybe later when we earn more money or have a family.*

*Yeah we just blow all our money on alcohol and stuff. We just care about ourselves, we don't really give a ### about anything else.* (Males, 18–21 years, Perth)

*I don't have a home or a car or a full time job at the moment so maybe when that starts to happen the decisions of the Government might be more critical but they don't really affect me, don't affect us now as we are. Later in life government decisions and an interest in politics might be important.*  
(Male, 22–24 years, Melbourne)

*We have very good intentions and things make us think. We are concerned about things but at the moment starting a career and pressures at work, don't have the time. When we're older, feel more secure and have more time we would get more involved.* (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)

*Probably when I own me own business, if that happens. When you have a family and a house I suppose.*

*Yeah, isn't it, have a kid and get five grand.'* (Males, 22–30 years, Condobolin)

*When you buy a house, when you get a full-time job, when you want to get a loan, or open your own business then it's relevant.* (Female, 18–21 years, Condobolin)

*I couldn't tell you much about it (government). I don't even vote because I don't think that I should be doing something I don't know anything about.* (Female, 18–21 years, Sydney)

*If you don't know what it means why would you pay attention to it. Like it's too hard to learn and there are a lot of words (political) that I don't know what they mean.*

*Parents talk about it. They say 'you are too young', but when am I not too young?*

*We are the future but we've got to know what they are doing about our future. You might as well be educated about it.* (Females, 18–21 years, Sydney)

*I couldn't tell you any one of my friends who is interested in politics.*

*I think I would be interested if we were told more about it. We don't understand it.*  
(Females, 18–21 years, Sydney)

The government was said to be more relevant to their parents and older people in general. Some maintained they defer to their parents when issues to do with government (including elections) cross their lives. Those living at home with their parents freely admitted that their parents generally deal with or advise them on issues such as health insurance, housing, superannuation, the cost of living and so on. Allied to this was the belief that the government and its policies generally focus on families, the elderly or disadvantaged segments of the community.

*They sort of focus a lot more on families. They don't really give a ### about people our age, people without kids. They couldn't give a crap about us.* (Male, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)

*They're not interested in us.*

*No it's pensioners, dole bludgers and Aboriginals.* (Males, 22–30 years, Condobolin)

*It probably is relevant. I suppose if it affects your parents then it affects you.*

*I just think we don't take any notice of it.*

*I don't understand it all, politics. When I go to vote I won't know who to vote for.*  
(Female, 18–21 years, Condobolin)

However, a closer consideration of the relevance of government stimulated further discussion of the issue. The government was said to be relevant when laws and rules passed or established by parliament affected the lives or lifestyles (in particular the social life) of young people. For most in the study, the relevance of government centred on:

- employment
- education (HECS debt)
- limited financial help to students
- alcopops tax, licensing hours and laws pertaining to serving of alcohol
- cigarette smoking in public places
- internet filtering
- passports (Smart Traveller)
- driving licences (rules and regulations)
- transport issues.

*The Alcopop tax being heavily debated in Senate now, it got so much attention compared to far more serious issues like Aboriginal rights, or gay rights, among our age group and even those a little bit younger because it directly affects you. You go buy a drink that you've been having for two years and it's going to be more expensive. And you might not be a binge drinker yourself, and you think, 'is this right?'* (Male, 22–24 years, Melbourne)

*They put the price of grog up, you know, the alcopops.* (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)

*Mostly (think of) issues that are relevant to us, not to the extent of Federal, but maybe like state, like schools, health, transport, they're pretty much relevant to us, any other things we probably won't think of.* (Female, 18–21 years, Sydney)

*The Government is relevant now but that's because I'm a farmer and it's relevant to farmers with all the assistance they provide, drought assistance, interest rate subsidies, all that gear they are giving us. (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)*

*They restrict you from doing what you want to. They restrict your fun, like only one person in the car at night. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*The driving thing annoys me. Thousands and thousands of people go down the Pacific Highway, then one person has an accident and they blow it up top this massive big thing and pick on P-platers. (Female, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*The Government wants to filter the web. It's annoying. I thought 'don't do that'. It came across as government is doing this and we have no say in it. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*I have a child and I get Centrelink money so I guess that helps me in my day-to-day life. (Female, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*Well they set the laws that we have to follow. And some of them aren't the best.*

*I guess the older we get, like getting our Ls and then being able to drink, so as we are getting older it becomes more relevant. But up until now, not at all. (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

## 6.4 Government communication

Young people initially react as one to all communication from government. They generally describe it as boring, uninviting and information heavy. However, when discussing government communication, young people in the study indicated that they tended to differentiate between three types of government communication:

- first, advertising associated with elections and the gaining of office. There is no real distinction between political party advertising and government advertising. The Kevin O'Keefe advertising was sometimes referred to as government advertising.
- second, social issues advertising, particularly that perceived to be aimed at young people (e.g. binge drinking, drugs, road safety).
- third, communication that contains specific informational content (e.g. wage/salary scales, tax levels, HECS, flu information).

*[Government advertising] Boring, especially at the end when it has the really mono-toned guy saying blah blah blah...*

*Yeah, can we make that bit more interesting? It's just so boring.*

*Some of them leave an impression then that bit at the end just ruins it. We don't really care who presented this ad, or who endorsed it, or who spoke. We don't care, it doesn't interest us at all.*

*Yeah make your point and get off!*

*We want to know what's relevant, with the least possible words and in the most interesting way. (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

### 6.4.1 Electioneering

Because young people associate politicians with government, they initially associate election advertising and media reporting on political parties with government communication. Their response to electioneering was not unlike their reaction to politicians—nearly always negative. Electioneering was perceived as reflecting the adversarial nature of politicians of all political persuasions and the system of government.

*Political ads are so confusing. They don't help. You watch them and all they say is 'he did this and he said we're not in recession' and that's all the ads are about, just bad mouthing the other guy. You tell kids at sport to be nice and shake the other team's hand but you go home and watch TV and the politicians are bad mouthing each other.*

*It's so confusing I lose interest. I lose heart. I leave it up to someone else who knows more.*

*It shows they have a nasty streak. It's not nice. It's not classy. A football star gets called unprofessional or unsportsmanlike, not a role model and yet politicians can do that just to win an election. It's so hypocritical really. (Females, 22–24 years, Toowoomba)*

#### 6.4.2 Issues communication

Government advertising specifically on issues involving young people received a mixed reaction from study participants. There was a reasonably strong recall of campaigns on anti-smoking, binge drinking and road safety. Some maintained it did not have any effect on them at all, while others considered it to be effective, realistic and relevant. However, almost all agreed that government communication directed to them tends to focus on what not to do.

*They are only interested in stopping us drinking and having a good time. (Female, 18–21 years, Perth)*

*They tend to concentrate on all the rules, telling us all the things that we can't or shouldn't do. (Males, 25–30 years, Northam)*

*They are like your mum and dad, they just want to tell you what to do. (Male, 22–24 years, Perth)*

*I think the ads are great and I think that's the only way the Government can do it, they really can't do anything else.*

*I think the images on TV are powerful, but they either scare you or they have no effect on you, as in you're already smoking and you don't really believe it or don't really care.*

*Stuff like drink driving, if it's just coming from magazines and stuff like that, you don't think it's that serious, but if the Government is making a say about it it's probably that serious level. (Females, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*There's the violent one, which I think people from our generation, who still currently go to the bars or who used to a little while ago, think, 'yeah I know that guy', or have seen that kind of incident before.*

*This is full-on, brutal, this is what happens, you can really relate to that, 'my friend's done that', or 'my friend had a brawl because he bumped into someone who was drunk and he got hit', or something like that. (Males, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

*Most government ads aimed at us use scare tactics to try and convince us not to do something, but I don't think they make any difference. (Female, 15–17 years, Perth)*

*They go all out, don't hold back and just show it how it is.*

*There's the one with the bar fight, about drinking too much, 'don't turn a night out into a nightmare'.*

*All those smoking ones—the one with the guys who asks for gangrene, the one where he cuts open the brain and there's blood clots everywhere.*

*And the one about tanning and skin cells being dying. (Males, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

When discussing government communication aimed at young people, study participants mentioned communication other than that relating to social issues, which most considered to be engaging and of interest to them. Advertising about the Australian Defence Force and Defence Force recruiting was the most frequently referred to in this regard.

*The Army and police ones are pretty inspirational, they talk about making a difference and being part of a team.*

*Yeah that you can make a difference to people's lives like 'I went and saved four people in Iraq' and I think well what the hell have I done today.*

*And they talk about how everyday is a different day and it sounds like it could be a really interesting job. (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

*With the army ones it gives you a situation and says 'what would you do?'. You do actually stop and think about it and what you would do in that situation. (Male, 15–17 years, Sydney)*

*I like the new Army and Navy ads. They show you the war stuff now as well as the other stuff you can do. (Male, 18–21 years, Perth)*

### 6.4.3 Importance and credibility of communication

Despite varying opinions on the effectiveness or meaningfulness of government communication, it was generally considered that most government 'issues' communication is of a serious or important nature, including that directed to young people. Issues like road safety, health and welfare, violence and illicit drug abuse were regarded as serious issues and were often said to be communicated with high and memorable impact. Communication by the government on social issues was generally regarded as credible, even when the communication was disliked or considered irrelevant or the content or message of the communication was resisted or found to be too confronting.

*There's ads for drugs and drink driving and I think they're done quite well actually because they're serious issues and they kind of confront you on the seriousness of it. (Female, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

Similarly, messages on topics such as the economy, unemployment, salary and wages were regarded as important for all Australians, even though the content often had little interest for young people. However, many messages on these issues were criticised for being boring, confusing, longwinded or irrelevant.

## 6.5 Engaging with government

### 6.5.1 General attitudes

In most group discussions, participants expressed a great deal of scepticism about the government's interest in young people; some thought it simply wanted to be seen to be interested. Young people thought that the only times government made special efforts to communicate with them were when it intended to introduce laws to regulate their behaviour (often seen as restricting their fun) or to gain their vote at election time.

*You know why we're not interested, everything we hear or see from the Government is negative—'don't do this', 'don't take drugs'—it's like the parent who doesn't encourage their child. They're not advertising or saying we want you to help. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*They are not interested in us. They're more concerned with baby boomers, like the stuff they are doing with Super and #### like that. (Female, 18–21 years, Perth)*

*We are only of interest to them as a campaign tool at election time. (Female, 18–21 years, Perth)*

*The Rudd Government had that Youth Forum. I don't know if they really want to listen to them, but they are giving the impression they want to listen by creating these forums. I don't know if it will lead to actual results. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*I feel like with government, if it's election time and you are of voting age, then they're listening to you. If it's not, they're interested in everyone else...I don't get the impression the PM or Government is looking to help young people. You know, there's all these lobbyists. There's no one there lobbying for students or young people because there's no monetary gain for anyone.*

*Coffs Harbour has been trying to get a new skate park for years, so many kids have been going around getting signatures and that...it's been so many years and nothing ever happens. (Males, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*We're not voting, we don't have any say so we don't matter.*

*Maybe when we get to the end of school they will care because we'll get jobs and stuff like that. (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

*When I get older, when we're 18. They might listen to us then, now we're just kids. (Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*I don't think they are interested in us at all.*

*They should be, we're the future. But we don't see that they are interested in us.*

*Maybe because we are not interested, we don't see if anything is going on. (Females, 18–21 years, Condobolin)*

*They're not interested in us, they are interested in the majority and that isn't us.*

*At best, they care when its election time. (Males, 22–24 years, Perth)*

*And they definitely don't have a focus for young people...again, I think they're all trying to be something that they're not. They're never going to connect with people our age. At least not the way they're going now.*

*To get to certain level of power in the Australian Government you have to be a certain age—so you find it really hard to break down that barrier of age when someone's that old compared to us who are so young. You need someone in there that you can relate to. (Females, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

Young people, because of their scepticism towards government and their perception that it had little relevance to their lives, had little interest in engaging with it on any level. Some contended that if there was an issue that they considered directly affected them or that genuinely interested them, then they might want to have their say. Others doubted that government would be interested in what they had to say.

*Why bother? What am I going to get out of it? They aren't going to change anything that affects me, it's not like they are going to change any of the driving laws or anything. (Male, 22–24 years, Perth)*

*I honestly have nothing. If they asked me I'd say go find someone else.*

*I don't think anything he (Kevin Rudd) does will affect us. Like at the moment we are so consumed in our little lives. School would be the most relevant thing they could work on, like more sporting facilities, or just make the school better, not so shabby. (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

*If I had some good issues I would. You wouldn't want to look like an idiot. (Male, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*You'd be sceptical that they were going to take it seriously. They'd be having a talkfest, making themselves feel good about asking us what we want and delivering nothing.*

*Yeah, I'd see it as a publicity stunt. It's just another version of kissing babies. (Males, 25–30 years, Northam)*

*If it's a good cause, for instance working at your local Red Cross to help raise money for the bushfire victims. Like if there's an actual reason to do it, then yeah. But not say the Rudd Government, 'hey come give me your ideas, because we've got none'. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

Allied to these views was the often-expressed opinion that they doubted that the government would reply to any communication they sent, or that any reply it did send would be complex or generic.

*If you wrote to the Government you'd just receive a standard letter that doesn't relate to your issue anyway. It's not worth it. There are so many things you have to do and you can't make a difference, or if they did respond, it would be so complex, you'd get back a 300 page document.*

*I doubt that government would want to listen to us. If everyone sent (a message or email) they won't read 20 million messages, they'll just read the 100 on top. If you did send something they wouldn't listen to just a kid. (Males, 15–17 years, Brisbane)*

*I wouldn't be confident of them taking any notice. If I went to the trouble of doing it, I'd want to hear back or hear something about it.*

*Yeah but who wants a standard reply that they'd send out to everyone. (Females, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*I don't think they'd listen to us; I wouldn't be expecting a reply. (Female, 22–24 years, Toowoomba)*

*Sounds like a publicity stunt to me.*

*Yeah, I doubt they would listen.*

*They might listen, but they wouldn't take any action. (Females, 18–21 years, Perth)*

### 6.5.2 Methods of communicating with government

When considering how they would communicate with government if they wanted to, some were unsure where to start; others put forward a variety of methods:

- Google a government website relating to the issue of concern and hope to find a link associated with contact details or frequently-asked questions
- establish who is their local member and make contact
- ask friends or parents for advice on how to make contact
- join a protest group or a group associated with the issue/concern
- if the department associated with the issue was known, Google to seek contact directions
- use government youth forums to make their views known.

Some suggested that government should take the initiative and indirectly make contact with them (i.e. provide a website or contact procedure).

**Technology:** When thinking about how government could contact them most young people in the study considered some form of technology would be mandatory. Young Australians communicate in a technological world and commercial organisations, in particular, communicate with them using modern-day technology. It was assumed that government would do the same. However, study participants were adamant that they did not want government communicating with them unless they had generated the request.

*The Government should only contact you when they need to. You don't want them contacting you all the time.*

*If you want to communicate with us you have to use technology. We don't need pamphlets anymore. (Males, 22–24 years, LOTE, Sydney)*

*If the Government wants to communicate with young people they could try YouTube, if they knew how to work it, and then get our opinions on that. (Male, 18–21 years, Toowoomba)*

*They should have a MySpace page, like set it up like a forum.*

*But they'd have to add you. I wouldn't bother going and finding them, like if they said 'hey you can voice your opinion' I'm like 'I don't care', but if they found everyone in the right age group, added them, then I might go on there.*

*Yeah they'd have to find us because I don't think teenagers think about the Government and go 'ooh, what can I tell them to get this changed' but if they contacted us, you might go 'well actually I want this changed, or I've got this idea'. (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

**Websites:** Young people were very familiar with websites and many were already aware of various government websites (notably Centrelink). In general, they considered government websites to be boring, and some to be confusing and difficult to navigate. Overall there was a mixed reaction, as can be seen from the following:

- ATO website—difficult to understand, *written by an accountant*
- E-tax website—*difficult*
- JobSearch website—*It's OK. It does what it's meant to do*
- 'Smartraveller' website—generally liked and easy to follow
- Bureau of Statistics website—*not up to date*
- Centrelink website—*could not deal with my situation*; often described as very confusing and difficult to navigate
- Road safety sites (RTA, VicRoads, Qld Transport)—generally described as helpful
- award rates/Wageline sites—*no luck, you just go in circles*
- Department of Health and Ageing—*website is out of date and kept directing me back to home page*
- local council websites—often confusing (regulations, re-zoning restrictions, tree chopping) so better to communicate on a face-to-face basis.

*They're usually a boring web design, old, outdated and don't really have many colours, basic and a lot of information, and it's hard to get through it. (Female, 22–24 years, Melbourne)*

*Centrelink website is convoluted. Heaps of stuff you go through and you have to fill out forms, massive forms. If you go online you don't want to have to fill out forms. (Male, 22–24 years, LOTE, Sydney)*

*Sometimes you don't want to have to go through the whole website to find something specific but sometimes if you search it doesn't come up straight away.*

*The high volume on government websites makes it hard to link up to what you need.  
(Males, 22–24 years, LOTE, Melbourne)*

*I currently have my résumé sitting on the Government internet site, and it still has my maiden name, and no matter how many times I contact them to change it...the automatic response letter that comes up when I apply for a job still has my maiden name. 9 times out of 10 they have no computer experience, they fluked getting the job because they knew somebody and I just hate that.  
(Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*The Centrelink one just has way too much information and is so hard to navigate, I find. It's good in one way, that it's got all the information there, but to some extent you don't know exactly what you're looking at. (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*Centrelink has too many sub menus. It takes so long to get to what you want. I don't think they really want you to get there. (Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*Sometimes people just want the basics, and the Government know what people are looking for. For example, if people are going on the Centrelink site, they want to know how much they're going to get paid, so why can't they put that at the top of the page, on bold or in a table...and then for the people who want to know more that information could be at the bottom of the page.  
(Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

**Youth website:** The use of a dedicated government website to communicate with young people was frequently mentioned by those who took part in the study. However, there was a strong opinion that it should not be like current government departmental sites. It was thought that even though the content would be mostly serious, the site should be more in tune with 'commercial' websites designed for young people and contain a number of key elements. It should be:

- interactive
- regularly updated
- colourful, bright
- easy to navigate
- friendly and inviting
- helpful and informative.

*One site for us would be good. It wouldn't be a bad idea. You'd use it when you need to, you know, if you wanted to know something. I suppose if you could talk to others and see what they had to say, you might use it.*

*They'd need to put things up alerting you to the changes they've made or different things they put on the site, different forums that are there.*

*If it was good you'd go back. If we find a half useful tool, we keep using it. Look at Facebook.  
(Males, 22–30 years, Condobolin)*

*It should be colourful and have like kids spaces, kids blogs where kids can talk to other kids about stuff. (Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*You could actually talk with other people, talk about the same thing for awhile, until like you found a good idea, how to help this problem. (Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*A government Google to enable you to ask questions on anything you wanted to know about government things. I would like info on how to handle issues between school and 25 years, money, jobs. (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)*

*A website might work but it would have to be specific to us and it couldn't just be like a normal government website. And we'd need to get some feedback, you know every month tell us what they have heard from us and what they are planning to do. (Female, 18–21 years, Perth)*

Concerns about a designated website were:

- only 'certain' people would use it
- the site could be bombarded with abuse
- government would be unlikely to reply or genuinely take note of their input
- negative views were unlikely to be acknowledged
- it would be too easy to delete an email/comment.

*A certain type of person wants to contribute but they don't represent all people, just certain ones. (Female, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*[Website] No, I don't think they'd listen to me face to face, so they're not going to listen to me via a website. It would all just end up in the bin. (Male, 25–30 years, Northam)*

*Would be a good idea where you could have a government website and have people to vote on different issues for their local area. If they get 80 per cent of people voting for an issue they should do it.*

*I think a typed letter would be best, you have to be persistent, that's the thing.*

*You don't get feedback from them. (Males, 18–21 years, Sydney)*

*A website would at least be a fair way for everyone to have their say, if they wanted to. (Male, 25–30 years, Northam)*

*I might look at it out of curiosity but I wouldn't use it.*

*Yeah, I wouldn't bother either. You'd just expect it to be boring.*

*Yeah if it was fun, interactive, colourful, not one of those government websites you'd be more likely to use it. (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

**Social network:** A few suggested that the government could enter a social networking site. However, there was a great deal of criticism of commercial organisations entering MySpace and Facebook web pages. The thought of the government entering a social networking site was even more disconcerting for many in the study. Most young people felt that their existing social networking sites were for their own private and personal use.

*They should get like someone under the age of 25 to do the MySpace page because if you get Kevin Rudd age wise doing it, he doesn't know much about teenagers. (Female, 15–17 years, Northam)*

**Protest and face to face:** A few study participants believed that a more confrontational approach to communicating would be the most effective. 'Old style' protest marches or 'sit-ins' were referred to in this regard. For these people some form of disruption to everyday life was the only way of guaranteeing a response from government or at least generating an awareness of an issue. Allied to this was the suggestion that government should come out to the people and see conditions for themselves. This was a particular request from those in rural areas.

*You need to have protests. People getting together. SMS and emails are impersonal.*  
(Male, 18–21 years, Sydney)

*I think protesting is the only way to get through to government when you are young.*  
(Male, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)

*They should come out and actually be involved, see what goes on. See it for themselves don't rely on others to tell them.* (Female, 18–21 years, Condobolin)

**Forums:** There was no general agreement on the benefit of forums for communicating the views of young people to government. As a concept it seemed a 'reasonable' approach and those most in favour were keen to be part of it. However, many felt that they may lack confidence in such a perceived public arena and showed a preference for a more one-on-one contact approach.

*I applied for the 2020 summit, and I got knocked back, but they recently emailed me because they're doing six conferences even in rural areas about the year, and they network via those video links so that all the capital cities and some rural areas are all talking together at once in this big conference and it's targeted at our age group. Things like that are a great idea, if they sold it better and if they made sure they're hitting the right topic. I can't remember what the topics were for the first one, but they were of no interest to me, I found that they were topics that weren't as relevant to youth right now, there's more pressing issues, like employment, and that wasn't on the list. Like one of the topics I remember was almost like a recruiting campaign about how to get young people into politics...they weren't talking about the hard issues...but it is a great concept.*  
(Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)

*I don't know if the website would work, but the face-to-face forums are far more accountable because you want an answer there and then and you can push the point 'til you get it and you've also got a group of people there watching who also want the answer. So you're more inclined to get the answers you want and they're likely to listen to you.* (Female, 22–24 years, Sydney)

### 6.5.3 Issues important to young people

Despite some reluctance to make contact with the government or to accept contact from the government, many young people in the study thought help, advice, support or simply information from government would be beneficial on a number of issues. Most of the issues were indicative of grassroots, as opposed to global, concerns. Key issues were:

- **Unemployment:** for those in a job the perceived greater likelihood of being retrenched due to the economic downturn; for those seeking employment, the increased competition due to growing unemployment numbers and the decline in job opportunities to do something that they would like to do.
- **Financial difficulties:** mentioned particularly by students, those currently unemployed and young mothers battling to make ends meet.
- **Relationship issues:** a range of concerns relating to balancing relationships with partners and friends, making new friends (particularly after moving state, country), sustaining friendships.
- **Violence:** frequent reference to street violence and club/pub violence (little mention of domestic or relationship violence).

*There's a media ban about Fortitude Valley. People don't know what's going on there. People can be killed there and it's not reported. We saw some guy get stabbed in the throat and we saw nothing about it in the media the next day.* (Male, 22–24 years, Brisbane)

*Last year there were two or three fights that I witnessed in the club...the city, in my experience, is pretty violent. So I've kind of like decided to shy away from the city, like I don't walk around the city at night by myself and I try to avoid Flinders and King Street. (Female, 18–21 years, Melbourne)*

- **Racism/cultural intolerance:**

*Government should do something on racial harmony. Like what happened in Cronulla. The Government was slow to act. Did not do anything. That was a hard time for us. (Male, 22–24 years, LOTE, Sydney)*

*Try and dispel the myths. People have the wrong idea about Islam especially after 9/11. Try and tell my friends (non-Moslem) what it means (things that are reported about Moslems). (Male, 22–24 years, LOTE, Sydney)*

- **Having and finding affordable accommodation:**

*They could do some stuff with rent assistance, it's really difficult to live out on your own, you can't afford it. You are forced to live in a big share house or go in with friends, but then not many people want to rent a place out to 3 or 4 young people.*

*Yeah, access to housing is very difficult for students and young people. You have to cram a lot of people into a single house and hope they don't find out. But if you don't do that, you just can't afford it.*

*Maybe they could help with loans for the bond. (Females, 18–21 years, Perth)*

- **Mental health issues:** depression, stress and suicide.

- **Lack of services in rural areas**

- **Education issues**

- **Community and recreational issues:**

*Spend more time in the community. (Male, 25–30 years, Northam)*

- **Environment:**

*I'd like to see them do something about global warming because that's something that is going to affect us in the future. (Female, 15–17 years, Northam)*

## 6.6 Communication expectations

### 6.6.1 Issue and content of message

There was a great deal of consistency in study participants' comments on what they expected from government communication directed to them. Content and message was often regarded as more important than the source or medium used. It was strongly felt that:

- Content and messages should be relevant in that the issue or topic needs to be one that young people can relate to or that concerns them. The issue's relevance may not always be obvious to them; if not, the issue needs to be framed in a way to make it more meaningful.
- The audience should be involved in developing communication either through research or directly. What do they think? How do they relate?
- Situations and issues should not be lied about or overly exaggerated.
- Messages should be brief and genuine.

- Language should be simple.
- Content should be engaging, involving and entertaining.
- Messages should use people and situations with which they can identify.
- Interaction should be encouraged.

### 6.6.2 Tone and style

The tone and style of communication relates to the issue being communicated. However, as a general rule it was suggested that every effort should be made to:

- avoid being monotonous and boring
- get to the point quickly, 'don't beat around the bush'
- not be patronising or condescending
- treat the audience with respect
- be positive (don't always focus on the negatives)
- consider including music and strong colourful visuals.

## 7. Regional and rural young people

In an overall sense, regional and rural young people were very similar to their urban counterparts in their attitudes to communicating and their use of communication technology. The major differences were in their access to technology and the opportunity to use it. Interestingly, this was also the opinion of stakeholders, with urban-based stakeholders assuming this would be the case and rural stakeholders confirming that access to technology and the opportunity to use technology were the key communication issues for rural young people.

### 7.1 Influences

The key influences on rural young people were the same as those on urban young people—parents, peers, teachers/lecturers, workmates and employers. The media and celebrities also play a role in influencing them.

*My dad listens to certain music so I do too. He likes country music, so I listen to it also.*  
(Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)

*I'll go to my dad for advice on stuff like work, the rest is mostly mates.* (Male, 18–21 years, Toowoomba)

*Your mates are pretty important. They give it to you if you do something wrong or different.*  
(Male, 15–17 years, Condobolin)

*If you are fighting with your family or your parents, your friends are the ones you turn to, the ones you talk to.* (Female, 18–21 Condobolin)

*Whether we like to admit it or not, stuff in the media does affect what you do. You know you see girls wearing stuff and think I've got to get one. Or like you hear about music and mobile phones, stuff like that.* (Female, 15–17 years, Condobolin)

In small regional communities, the need for young people to 'fit in' can be even more important than it is for urban young people. For those whose interests are seen 'to lie on the fringe', it can be very difficult. Unlike in urban areas, where young people often eventually found others who shared their interests, regional and rural young people take more of a risk when they choose to align themselves to a less popular or less mainstream subculture.

*It can be pretty harsh at school if you don't fit in. Some of the stuff at school is pretty nasty. I wouldn't like it, that's for sure.* (Female, 15–17 years, Northam)

### 7.2 Information and entertainment sources

The internet, television, print and radio are important sources of information and entertainment for regional and rural young people. In fact, in some respects these sources can be more important than they are for urban young people, as regional and rural young people believe they have limited access to information and entertainment sources generally.

The internet was every bit as important for young people in regional and rural areas as it was for those in urban areas, if not more so. The internet provides entertainment and information opportunities, with social networking sites being the most popular sites because they provide the opportunity for young people to reach out beyond their town, region, or even country.

*On MySpace you can learn heaps of new stuff and can talk to your friends.* (Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)

*Apart from Facebook and MSN my main stuff would be YouTube and Lime Wire.*  
(Male, 15–17 years, Condobolin)

*There's not much to do around here so if you're not doing homework, or playing sport with mates you're on the net or watching TV.* (Male, 15–17 years, Condobolin)

Access to broadband can be an issue young people in some regional areas, for those who live in more remote locations and for those who live 'out of town'. Those living in remote areas or out of town have to rely on satellite, while those in town believe their broadband internet connections are not as advanced or as fast as those used by people in the city. Rural stakeholders were also quick to point out potential differences in broadband quality and barriers to access in regional and rural areas.

*I'm out of town so I have to have satellite broadband.* (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)

*Out here the internet's heaps slow, well on my computer anyway. I've got broadband.* (Male, 15–17 years, Condobolin)

*To get broadband you have to be within a certain distance of the post office.*

*Our grandparents can't get it because they are too far out.* (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)

Rural and regional young people, like urban young people, were less likely to make spontaneous mention of television as a source of information; however, they considered it a key source of information, although it was often a source of entertainment rather than information. For young males who love their sport, particularly one of the football codes, the television was considered essential.

*You learn a lot from TV actually. You see more things on TV than anywhere else.*  
(Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)

*I watch a lot of sport on TV. We can't go and watch our team play so you have to watch it on the TV.* (Male, 15–17 years, Condobolin)

The print media was not an important source of news or information for regional and rural young people. However, both males and females said they read magazines, although females were much more likely than males to claim to read them.

*We read Dolly and Girlfriend.*

*Yeah, most of the ads we brought in are from Dolly and Girlfriend.* (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)

*Mate I can't remember the last time I bought a magazine, they're bloody expensive. I might pick one up if I'm waiting for some take away but I won't buy one.* (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)

### 7.3 Methods of communication

Communication methods among regional and rural young people were very similar to those for urban young people:

- Face-to-face communication remains popular as it provides intimacy and is essential for sensitive, personal and important conversations, particularly as it lessens the chance of misinterpretation. Rural stakeholders agreed that word of mouth can be very powerful in smaller, close-knit communities, and that local networks such as schools and sporting organisations should be used whenever possible.
- Landline telephone use is less important for peer-to-peer communication than for parental contact and as a source of communication in the workplace. For those unable to get mobile phone reception, the landline remains important.

- Mail is virtually never used except for making applications, sending and receiving forms and other 'official' communication.
- Mobile phones and the internet are the main methods of communication.

Like their urban counterparts, regional and rural young people recognised the importance of technology to their day-to-day communication and claimed that they would be lost without it. However, they believed they are perhaps a little behind those in urban areas due to slower internet speeds and limited mobile coverage, particularly in regard to the newer 3G mobile phone technologies. Rural stakeholders also felt that some young people might be 'missing out' due to their limited access to technology. There was, however, no evidence that regional and rural young people fear technology or are less confident with it than urban young people.

*I don't think we are restricted too much up here. We've all got mobiles and internet.*  
(Female, 15–17 years, Northam)

*No mobile phone and no internet. I don't even want to think about it!* (Female, 18–21 years, Condobolin)

*Now that I'm working in town I use my mobile a lot, but if I was still out there I wouldn't be. It doesn't work out there.* (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)

*There'd be no use having one of them iPhones out here, you couldn't use it.* (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)

Young people in rural areas use modern technology for communicating in exactly the same way as urban young people. While some conversations, such as those considered to be personal, important or needing a quick response, required face-to-face interaction or the telephone, many other conversations were conducted via SMS and/or the internet via instant messaging and social networking sites. In a practical sense, this results in communication being reduced in areas where mobile phone coverage is poor. Therefore, those who live or work out of town can miss out on some of the more regular communication with their peers. Rural stakeholders also confirmed that young people living out of town and those in more isolated areas can struggle with mobile phone reception.

*I hate phone calls. MSN and Facebook, even texting is much better.* (Male, 15–17 years, Condobolin)

*It's easier, you just jump online and you can talk to them in about 5 seconds. You don't have to worry about calling them or interrupting them.* (Male, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)

*95 per cent of the time I'm on the net I'm in a conversation.* (Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)

*Facebook is easier (than email). You log on more often than you email. It's less formal and you can see when friends are online.* (Female, 22–24 years, Toowoomba)

Like urban young people, rural and regional young people considered SMS and social networking sites much cheaper to use than phones. They also pointed out that they could use those communication methods in conjunction with other activities such as homework, watching TV, being on the internet etc. SMS was also often described as a boredom breaker.

*If I'm bored on the way to or from school I usually text someone. You've got nothing else to do.*  
(Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)

*[MSN] doesn't cost anything. Well it costs your parents for the internet, but that's not much.*  
(Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)

*...you can still do other things while you are communicating.*

*Yeah, you can be talking to someone on Facebook but be doing other things or on other sites.*

*Yeah, you hear it come up and you go back to it. (Males, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*I mainly use it (SMS) to keep my phone bill down. I can catch up with mates, see what they are doing and it doesn't cost me a fortune. (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)*

The use of social networking sites was just as prevalent among regional and rural young people as among urban young people. In fact, for some it appeared more important, as it helped overcome any sense of isolation they might feel. It allowed them to meet and communicate with young people from all over Australia and the world. It was also a way of keeping track of friends who had left town for tertiary education or to seek employment opportunities elsewhere. However, like urban young people, they did not necessarily consider many of their social network contacts to be close friends.

*I reckon less than 10 per cent of friends on Facebook would be local. (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)*

*Most of my friends on Facebook are local. I've got a couple of mates on there who went away to school.*

*Then there's all the random people you just meet on there. (Male, 15–17 years, Condobolin)*

*It's great for overseas. I met this Kenyan chick on there and we use it to talk all the time. If I had to use the phone I'd be ### broke. (Male, 25–30 years, Northam)*

*I've got a few mates who have gone overseas, so we can talk to them, see what they are up to. And then you find you meet people through them, their contacts. (Male, 25–30 years, Northam)*

*No one rings old friends anymore. It's easier to just jump on line and send them a quick message. (Female, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)*

The internet was also used by a variety of stakeholders to communicate with and provide information to young people in regional and rural areas. Clearly, stakeholders recognised the importance of the internet to young people and their communication, and therefore embraced it as a channel to engage with young people. A variety of methods were adopted:

- Some stakeholders simply had a website to ensure that young people could contact them and find the information they were looking for. For example, Dubbo Council was developing a user-friendly Youth Services Directory online so that young people could quickly and easily find what services are available in the area, who can help them, and how they can obtain help.
- Some, like the Future Farmers Network, had taken their use of the internet one step further and were holding online discussions and forums. They felt that conducting these sessions online was an efficient way of overcoming the distance between members. However, they were also conscious that online was not necessarily all-inclusive and that face-to-face opportunities were also needed. Similarly, the Rural Women's Network had success with a virtual work experience project that provided young women with the opportunity to interact with people from different occupations and ask them about their jobs and lives.
- Rural stakeholders were also using, or planning to use, social networking sites to communicate with young people. However, as mentioned in section 4, few understood how to use them successfully. Some had tried, with limited success, while others were simply planning to use the sites and had not given a great deal of thought to how they might most effectively do so.

## 7.4 Communicating with young rural people

### 7.4.1 Segmentation

Regional and rural young people did not view themselves as fundamentally different from urban young people. However, they felt they were disadvantaged in terms of having fewer opportunities for entertainment and employment and less access to education and services, both government and non-government. They also recognised that those who lived in smaller towns and those who lived out of town were at an even greater disadvantage.

The most obvious form of segmentation for them was based on whether you lived in town or out of town and the size of that town. Young people in Coffs Harbour, for example, felt disadvantaged compared with those in Sydney, while those in Condobolin felt considerably disadvantaged compared with those in Parkes.

Aside from town size and physical location, young people felt the most appropriate way to segment themselves was according to:

- age (primarily under 15 years; 15–17 years and 18–24 years)
- being at school, at university or working
- working on the land or in other employment
- being single or married/partnered.

Interestingly, rural stakeholders suggested that aside from age, gender, attitudes and behaviours, another key criterion for segmentation was location; that is, whether a young person was located in a large regional centre, a small town, out of town, or in a genuinely remote location. They viewed this as an important distinction as it relates to access to technology (mobile phone and broadband coverage), access to other young people, and access to government and other services.

### 7.4.2 Communication directed to young rural people

Regional and rural young people expressed similar attitudes to those of urban young people in regard to advertising and communication aimed at them:

- They felt bombarded by advertising for all aspects of their lives.
- They don't appreciate any kind of authoritarian or condescending tone. They want to be talked to and treated with respect.
- They are sceptical of attempts by the adult world to use their language and culture.
- They prefer advertising and communication that:
  - has music
  - is colourful and visually powerful
  - is humorous, clever and/or different
  - is concise and to the point
  - is uncomplicated and uncluttered
  - reflects their lives and values.

*The beer companies all seem to do funny stuff. Like Carlton's running a competition to win \$50 grand to like just muck about and look like a ###.*

*The XXXX ones on TV are good too.*

*Yeah they're great. (Males, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*All the good ads are by the alcohol companies, Bundy, XXXX, SuperDry. (Male, 18–21 years, Toowoomba)*

*Sometimes they try to be cool and it doesn't work. It's like they are trying too hard. (Female, 22–24 years, Toowoomba)*

*It needs to be clever, make you think or laugh and not just treat us like idiots.*

*And not formal, you know it should be they way you speak to your friends.*

*But they have to get it right otherwise it just looks like they are trying too hard. Have you seen that Step Brothers movie, that's a classic example of trying too hard, an over the top effort to be one of us. (Male, 18–21 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*I think people having fun in the ad is always good.*

*Yeah like the Bonds ad with the high tops.*

*Yeah we watched that today on YouTube.*

*TV ads with music that you can sing to, like the Subway ad. We went on YouTube and saw that one too. (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

*They had that billboard 'Drink and Drive and score a date with a blond' and it had the judge with the wig on. (Male, 25–30 years, Northam)*

Regional and rural young people claimed that communication is often not relevant to and reflective of their lives, because it frequently features urban young people and urban settings. They felt that some advertising excluded or ignored them. They clearly appreciated advertising and communication that was seen to include them or that was specifically targeting them. Such communication tended to be local or regional specific advertising, or government campaigns that had been designed to reflect and represent both urban and regional young people. However overall, it was felt that advertising that successfully spoke to urban young people, particularly brand and product advertising, was generally successful with regional and rural young people.

*You know what, most ads are aimed at people in the city not us in the country. If they are, they're for local shops, or farm stuff.*

*Sometimes the speeding stuff shows guys our age in the country. (Males, 22–30 years, Condobolin)*

Both rural stakeholders and those stakeholders with experience in communicating with regional and rural young people mentioned the importance of ensuring that communication directed to them has a regional slant. One agency representative suggested that when doing social marketing campaigns they often tried to have an urban and a rural version of the campaign, so that the 'look and feel' of the regional creative executions better reflected the lives of young people in regional areas. Often this simply involved some executions featuring regional settings and 'less urban looking talent'.

From a rural stakeholder perspective, the keys to communicating with young people were very similar to those of all stakeholders:

- Listen to them and understand them before formulating your message and approach to delivering that message.
- Be brief and concise when you deliver the message and give them an avenue to seek more information if they want to.
- Talk to them, with them, but not at them or down to them.

- If possible, be positive—most of the communication they receive from government is considered negative in nature and tone.
- Be honest and respectful.
- Do not use overly formal language but be careful not to be seen to be trying to use their language.
- Use relevant images, settings and talent in communications.
- Use a variety of mediums and don't forget that some young people in Australia are somewhat isolated, or have limited access to technology. The use of local associations and networks can be helpful in regional and rural areas.

## 7.5 Regional and rural young people and government

### 7.5.1 Perceptions of government

Regional and rural young people's knowledge and perceptions of government were very consistent with those of urban young people:

- There was some awareness of the three levels of government but a poor understanding of the role of each.
- The federal government and Kevin Rudd had the highest profile, although there was also mention of local members in some locations.
- The recent stimulus package direct payment to taxpayers was often top of mind.
- There was little knowledge or discussion of government departments, except for Centrelink, which a few participants had dealt with.
- In most cases, messages were seen to be from government rather than specific departments, except perhaps for Defence Force recruitment and police recruitment advertising.
- Spontaneous comments with regard to government tended to relate to politicians, the negative opinions they had of politicians and the lack of trust they had in politicians, and as a result, government.

*[State Government] give us Police and State Emergency Services don't they?*

*Police are federal aren't they?*

*No, I think they are state. (Females, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*Federal is responsible for hospitals aren't they?*

*No I think it's state.*

*Roads and road rules, that's federal isn't it? (Females, 18–21 years, Condobolin)*

*My understanding is that if they do badly, it affects the economy. Like at the moment my hours at work have been cut back and it's all blamed on this recession and everyone's panicking. The Federal Government are supposed to be responsible or supposed to maintain control over it. If they do a better job, then my hours will go back up. So that's how they affect me. (Male, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*Has anyone ever been elected and done everything they said? They say one thing then do whatever it takes to get elected. (Female, 22–24 years, Toowoomba)*

*I just can't trust the Government. There's no trust. They are full of crap. They get all these billions of dollars and special privileges. It's all just so excessive. (Female, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)*

### 7.5.2 Relevance of government

Young people in regional and rural areas felt that the government lacked relevance; in fact, most were uninterested in it. Most young people felt that regional and rural areas were of less interest to government than urban areas. It was therefore not surprising that they demonstrated a slightly higher level of disconnection from government than their urban counterparts did.

Stakeholders reflected these views, suggesting that rural young people would have little knowledge of government and specific departments and would be sceptical of government and politicians. Interestingly, rural stakeholders suggested that regional and rural young people had a greater level of disconnection from government than urban young people because of their perception that governments tended to ignore regional Australia.

Regional and rural young people initially considered the government irrelevant to their lives:

- Government is not something they think or talk about. It is a topic that more often than not they would avoid.
- They think government is something that only becomes relevant later in life (e.g. with greater income and responsibilities such as a mortgage and a family).
- They believe that government is not interested in young people or their opinions.

*They have no relevance to me. If anyone mentions government I switch off.* (Female, 22–24 years, Toowoomba)

*I just block it out. I'm not around anyone who talks about it either, so no, it's not relevant to me.* (Female, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)

*Stop spending money in the city. Spend some money in the country. We're just an after thought.* (Male, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)

*They sort of focus a lot more on family. They don't really give a ### about people our age, people without kids. They couldn't give a crap about us.* (Male, 18–21 years, Toowoomba)

*They don't really do that much for young people.* (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)

*I don't know. It's kind of based around the city, not the country and I don't think it's that fair sometimes.* (Male, 15–17 years, Condobolin)

*They don't care about us, other than maybe education.*

*Or that apparently the majority of us drink too much.* (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)

After further consideration, study participants began to recognise and discuss the areas of their lives in which the government was relevant. As with urban young people, government was thought to be most relevant to them through the various laws and regulations that apply to young people, such as licensing regulations (L-plate and P-plate regulations), binge drinking advertising and the alcohol tax, and anti-smoking advertising and laws. Government was also thought to be relevant through:

- employment and education
- the youth allowance and other financial help
- roads and transport
- financial help for farmers and their families.

*As a farmer I can get different types of assistance from the Government, so I suppose that makes them relevant. (Male, 25–30 years, Northam)*

*I suppose they have a lot to do with schools.*

*Aren't they taking up the leaving age. You will have to be 17 to leave school now. (Male, 15–17 years, Condobolin)*

*For farm assistance, it's Centrelink.*

*And I'm an apprentice, so I get a tool allowance and an income top up, but it's not enough. I'd be doing much better if I was just labouring. (Males, 22–30 years, Condobolin)*

*They are changing laws all the time that relate to us, like the L-plate laws.*

*Yeah, the 120 hours you have to do on your L's...I don't think that's going to make much difference in terms of deaths and stuff.*

*Yeah, I bodgied my logbook up so much...like it says you have to drive in the city, through e-tolls and stuff like that. What kids get the chance to do that out here?*

*Out here it's fairly good for scholarships and that.*

*Yeah, we get a boosted UAI to help us into uni. (Males, 15–17 years, Condobolin)*

### 7.5.3 Government communication

Regional and rural young people regarded government communication aimed at, or relevant to, them primarily as telling them what to do and what not to do. In that sense, road safety, binge drinking, and anti-smoking advertising were at the top of their mind.

*It shows them in the pub and how their brain slows down.*

*And that one about every police car is an RBT. (Males, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)*

*All them don't smoke ads, 'don't turn a night out into a nightmare'.*

*Those driving ones, the one with the pinkie. (Males, 15–17 years, Condobolin)*

*[Pinkie] everyone does it now, you know, they are having a go at the driver, but I don't think the driver takes any notice. (Female, 18–21 years, Condobolin)*

*[Binge Drinking Campaign]...they are pretty much the worse case scenario that can happen if you drink.*

*Yeah they are really kind of gory and over the top.*

*But they do make you think about what could happen if you do have one too many. (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

*The other one that's out is about the pregnant lady at the pub and the guy who has had too much to drink knocks her and she falls and knocks the baby.*

*I find that one really hard to watch.*

*Yeah that one gets to me too. (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

## 7.6 Engaging with government

Like urban young people, regional and rural young people expressed a great deal of scepticism about government's interest in them and wondered whether it simply wanted to be seen to be interested in them. Rural stakeholders believed that regional and rural young people were unlikely to engage with government due to their level of disconnection from it. One rural stakeholder, however, suggested that rural and regional young people were almost as likely to engage with government as urban young people were, as in his experience it was the 'Student Representative Council kids that get involved' while the others show a distinct lack of interest.

*Apart from the fact that we have jobs and pay tax, they are not interested in us at all.*  
(Male, 25–30 years, Northam)

*I really think that my word's not going to change anything... You could talk until you are blue in the face to get your opinion across but at the end of the day you think your just still not being listened to, because you know what 'what would you know, you are just a young person'.* (Female, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)

*If we have a whinge, young people, we do it by ourselves, whereas the oldies they get 50 000 of them and all whinge together, and they have 'A Current Affair' on their side as well... No-one really wants to listen to us.* (Male, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)

Given their scepticism regarding the government and its interest in young people, it was not surprising that most in regional and rural areas expressed little interest in engaging with the government. Most felt it was of no interest to them or that it would be futile as the government would not listen or respond. A small number of participants, however, suggested they would be interested in engaging or communicating with the government on issues that they felt strongly about.

*It depends on what subject it is.*

*It wouldn't get listened to or read.*

*It would be good to have some input though.* (Females, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)

*You wouldn't be confident of them taking any notice.* (Male, 25–30 years, Northam)

*If I had some good issues I would, but I'm not sure what they would be.* (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)

*I think it's good to have an input but I don't think our opinion matters.* (Male, 18–21 years, Toowoomba)

*I just don't think we'd be interested in getting involved. Politics is boring.* (Female, 15–17 years, Northam)

*Why would you bother, it wouldn't change anything. Nothing changes. They just want you to feel good because you think something is going to happen.* (Female, 18–21 years, Condobolin)

Many regional and rural young people expressed a preference for contacting government through their local member (as local members tended to have a higher profile than those in urban areas), through government coming to them/their town to get first-hand experience of their situation and through the internet.

Young people who knew they had a local member felt that on issues they felt strongly about they would make contact with government through their local member. As none of our study participants had done this, we question whether they would do so in the future, or whether any issue would be perceived to be of sufficient importance for them to consider contacting their local member.

There was some mention of the 'Drought Bus' which travelled through regional areas talking to people and giving them information about what assistance was available. This was considered an effective initiative and some young participants suggested that a similar approach could be taken to engaging with young people in regional and rural areas. Alternatively, some young people simply suggested that government should get out to regional areas to see what life is like and to talk to people about what can be done to improve their lives. Any such initiative should include specific discussion and engagement with young people.

*They could come out and talk to us. Like the 'Drought Bus' has been pretty successful, why can't they do something like that?* (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)

The most commonly suggested method for engaging regional and rural young people was via the internet. While many had visited government websites and were generally unimpressed with them (as discussed in section 5), some felt that a dedicated youth website might be the best way for regional and rural young people to engage with government.

*At the moment, by the time you find what you are looking for you've been on there for hours. So it would have to be better than their sites are now.* (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)

They felt that such a website could provide:

- information on the range of services and assistance available to young people
- an avenue for young people to have input into decision making and policy (including forums and pages where young people could discuss issues and solutions)
- feedback from the government on what it is likely to do with the feedback and suggestions provided.

*Yeah I'd write what I had to say on a website.*

*If it was genuine I would use it.* (Female, 25–30 years, Coffs Harbour)

*They need to let us know what is available, what assistance we can get for different things.* (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)

*It could be a good idea, but it would depend on whether everyone would just put a whole lot of #### on there, and you'd need to see something happen from it otherwise no one would bother.* (Male, 25–30 years, Northam)

They were, however, eager to point out that a dedicated youth website would need to 'look and feel' like a website for young people rather than a website designed by government for them. In addition, it was agreed that it would need to be fluid, constantly changing and evolving (as do their favourite websites), and that providing feedback to their requests, questions, suggestions etc. would be essential. Without this feedback they would be unlikely to keep going back to the website. These issues were no different from those expressed by urban young people in the study.

However, many, if not most, regional and rural young people, simply reiterated that they (and many others like them) would not be interested in engaging with government.

*It wouldn't really make much difference I reckon. I don't reckon they'll really listen. So many people would go on it and write stuff and they'd be like 'we can't do none of that stuff' and they'd just go through and pick out the real little stuff.* (Male, 15–17 years, Coffs Harbour)

*I kind of feel that if I sent them an email it wouldn't get read, it would just get tossed aside.*

*Yeah fully, like you'd be putting it in but it wouldn't do anything. It's just there, like this is where you put all of your complaints or thoughts to the Government but it just goes to a computer sitting in a room somewhere.* (Males, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)

## 7.7 Issues important to regional and rural young people

Young people in regional and rural areas focused on similar issues to those of their urban counterparts. Those issues that they shared in common with urban young people were as follows:

- **Unemployment**—lack of job opportunities and concerns that they would lose an existing job. However, for regional and rural young people there was the added issue that regardless of the current economic downturn they often had to travel some distance or move in order to find work or their preferred area of work. Interestingly, females expressed greater concern about work opportunities than did males, with females in smaller towns suggesting their opportunities tended to be limited to retail or hospitality, whereas young males had opportunities through apprenticeships, labouring etc.

*The state of jobs and employment. Coffs Harbour, the home of gainful employment. The employment system here just doesn't work. You go to the employment agency and there's 50 other people there as well. They don't get you a job, you've got to go out and find a job.*

*Yeah and they pump heaps of money into these agencies and give subsidies to employers, but none of that helps anyone get a job. (Males, 22–24 years, Coffs Harbour)*

- **Financial difficulties**—particularly for apprentices who had to travel and stay overnight to attend TAFE, those wanting to or already attending university, and young mothers.
- **Relationship issues**—in regional and rural areas these issues can take on greater significance as 'everyone knows your business' and it can be difficult to get away for awhile.
- **Violence**—although less an issue in regional areas than in urban areas, it was still an issue, with some participants referring to the role of race and alcohol.
- **Mental health issues**—particularly depression and stress caused by the drought.

*Personally I've been in drought a lot longer than the rest of the Shire and its starting to get a bit hard because we haven't been getting the assistance from as early as we needed it. We're not trying to bludge or anything, it's just a bit hard. If I could grow a 16–18 bag wheat crop I'd love to. Mr Rudd can't make the rain fall, he can give us a bit of money to buy food and that, but really that's all he's doing. But he can't make it rain and that's the thing that's getting a bit hard. Then you've got other things like depression, you've got depression comin' in, mental disorders and that, just from being down all the time and the pressure of running the farm and trying to work out when you'll get money, how you'll pay the next bill. (Male, 22–30 years, Condobolin)*

- **Lack of services**—with regional young people referring to the need to travel to access some government, hospital and educational services.

*Better roads and better infrastructure, like parks, hospitals all that sort of stuff.*

*The hospital's ### here. It's nearly closed down.*

*Yeah, and the retirement village is just about ###.*

*If they don't fix that stuff now it's not going to be here in 20–30 years time. Once they close down they don't come back again. In the history of Condo, once something closes down it never opens back up again. (Males, 22–30 years, Condobolin)*

*There's no actual Centrelink or government agency in Condo, so people in Condo have got to go 100k, I've got to go 170 odd k just to get a question answered. (Female, 18–21, years, Condobolin)*

- **Education**—particularly access to all of the courses available to those in urban areas in their HSC years, access to (and affordability of) tertiary education and the quality and condition of school facilities.

*For TAFE, for our apprenticeships we have to go to Dubbo. It's an hour and a half away.*

*Then you've got to pay for your accommodation over there and food and everything. It costs a fair bit just to go to TAFE.*

*The Government or TAFE offers something like \$29.80 a night for when you have to go away and stay over for TAFE, but really, it's ### all.*

*Yeah, you can't book a motel room for \$29. (Males, 22–30 years, Condobolin)*

*There should be more opportunities for kids who don't want to go to school because school isn't for everybody.*

*Yeah there should be more training stuff that isn't about sitting there with pen and paper.*

*And around this area everything is so trade based, like you've got to be a builder or a bricklayer or something but not everyone around here, like girls, they don't want to be builders or brick layers, they want to be chefs or something.*

*Yeah, it's like you can be a checkout chick or work in a store, so yeah more opportunities for us in the country. (Females, 15–17 years, Northam)*

- **Community and recreational issues**—the quality and condition of recreational facilities and the lack of recreational and entertainment options.

*I'd talk to them about the state of recreational facilities in country areas and just general things to do for people in the country. We're pretty lucky here, we're pretty close to Perth, but really a swimming pool and an oval, that's all we've got. (Male, 25–30 years, Northam)*

*It would be good if more festivals and concerts came to the country. (Male, 25–30 years, Northam)*

- **The environment**—while some expressed interest in global environmental issues, for most the drought was the issue as they worked on the land or their employment was related to those who worked on the land, or simply that the success of the farmers affected the success of the town or region.

## 8. Indigenous young people and communication

The Origin Communication group conducted a series of eight mini group discussions with Indigenous young people (15–24 years) and four interviews with stakeholders who work with Indigenous young people. Discussions were conducted across five locations: Sydney, Perth, Wagga Wagga (NSW), Palmerston (NT), and Nambour (Qld).

### 8.1 Influences on Indigenous young people

#### 8.1.1 In general

Research found that Indigenous young people recognised that there were both positive and negative influences on them and their peers.

Negative influences included:

- peer pressure
- drugs
- alcohol
- crime.

Positive influences included:

- immediate family and extended family (nieces, nephews, cousins and elders)
- media
- music
- celebrities
- sportspeople.

In regard to influences, findings were similar to the study conducted among mainstream young people. When asked about what influenced them personally, family relationships were top of mind for the Indigenous young people who took part in this study. Family, friends and elders were dominant influences.

*I look up to my mother. (Female, 18–21 years)*

*My uncle has had lots of jobs, hard working good man, travelled. (Male, 22–24 years)*

Even those without family support were aware of what they were missing:

*Myself, I haven't had any good influences in my life, so I have to influence and motivate myself. (Female, 22–24 years)*

*Working people with good jobs influence me because I don't work and one day I would like to. (Female, 18–21 years)*

Generally the research indicated that Indigenous young people view traditional media as a trustworthy source of information and as one that has a positive influence on them. Media includes TV, magazines, radio and newspapers. In addition to these sources, they also obtained information from the internet, via Google, and from family and friends.

#### 8.1.2 Stakeholders

Stakeholders endorsed the influence of friends and family as a major influence on Indigenous young people, but they also saw role models, music, television and radio as having a critical impact. Stakeholders also saw the internet as a key influence.

### 8.1.3 Additional consultants' comments

In the opinion of the Indigenous research consultants:

- Influences will be primarily geographically and socially driven (e.g. access to media, language and community environment).
- Family members will have a particular influence in terms of normative behaviour, personal expectations and attitudes to issues such as work, education and credit.
- Those with positive elders and community strength will rely on them for direction and support; those without may find alternative supports or avenues, while others may simply succumb to intergenerational patterns of dysfunction.
- 'High flyers' (i.e. Indigenous people who have been successful either in sport, music, politics or academia) influence young people as positive role models. If they have acted badly, on the other hand, their actions will be used in cautionary tales to illustrate what not to do and how not to behave. There is also a lot of suspicion of and caution towards people who 'do well'. They are under scrutiny and may be perceived as having lost their grassroots links with the community.
- Familial and intergenerational issues of unemployment, lack of access to education, and incarceration are increasing (in all locations—it is not only remote communities that are suffering).
- TV, film and internet are major influencers of fashion and style, for urban and rural young people in particular. Mainstream TV programs, magazines and music are particularly strong influences, as is sport (especially football) at national code levels.
- Remote areas will include additional focus on local sports teams and music (as national codes are necessarily a 'TV viewer only' option).

There is a great deal of interaction and movement between locations and communities, so the assumption should not be made that 'remote' means 'disconnected'. Many young people in remote areas are better connected with social networks than their counterparts in rural and urban areas because of the lack of alternative events, activities and programs in the locations in which they live. They can be in a more tight-knit community.

## 8.2 Communicating

### 8.2.1 Overall

The comments made by Indigenous young people in the study indicated that mobile phones were the predominant and preferred channel for communicating with others, because of widespread ownership, accessibility and ease of use.

An overwhelming majority of study participants cited SMS as the method they most frequently used for communicating. A similar finding was made in relation to other young Australians. Mobile phones were also used as a precursor for face-to-face contact (e.g. sorting out where and when to meet). The benefits of using SMS were seen as its cost-effectiveness and speed. In urban and regional communities, mobile phones in general were seen as being very cost-effective; as a result, they are very popular.

Other commonly used methods for communicating were face-to-face contact and the internet (especially by emails and through social networking sites). The following were mentioned as preferred ways to interact online: email, Bebo, Facebook, MySpace and YouTube.

Access to the internet is a major issue. In rural and regional communities most young people do not have internet at home and rely on family, friends and public access (e.g. libraries and internet cafes). However, if internet providers do not permit use of social networking facilities from public access points or from community organisations, Indigenous young people are at a disadvantage in communicating with their friends. Social networking is a major means of Indigenous young people communicating with each other. Any curtailment of services adds to the cost associated with both poor internet coverage and mobile phone reception.

### 8.2.2 With parents and government

Indigenous young people used SMS primarily to communicate with their peers. They were more likely to have a phone conversation with their parents and older people. Young participants maintained that parents and older people do not always know how to text or the response is not so immediate. Their communication with parents and senior family members is different from that with their friends in terms of language and method. They are respectful in their communication with parents and family members, but are more relaxed and informal with friends with whom they can laugh and joke.

Overall, the research found that Indigenous young people favoured face-to-face communication with government and most other organisations. Phone contact was seen as a poor substitute. Community networking was only mentioned in reference to getting information from a trusted source (such as a current community member); generally, young people want government to talk to them directly through forums or face to face.

All forms of face-to-face contact, including mentoring, youth services, community forums and one-on-one consultations, were seen as effective forms of communication and were believed to have the highest impact among Indigenous young people. It was felt that the use of Indigenous community members facilitated trust based on a shared understanding. Some study participants also mentioned the media, post and phone as alternative forms of communication that could be used to reach Indigenous young people.

### 8.2.3 Remote locations

When asked about issues that differentiate rural, regional and remote Indigenous communities, some Indigenous young people suggested that a lack of face-to-face contact disadvantaged them; others suggested that the language barrier disadvantaged them, as English is not their first language. A lack of mobile phone network coverage and internet reception exacerbates the problem of isolation.

For remote communities, radio is the most effective media channel due to access and use.

### 8.2.4 Stakeholder input

Stakeholders reinforced the advantages of online communication as an important channel for them and their respective organisations to interface with Indigenous young people. For them, connecting and communicating online was most effective when used in conjunction with face-to-face forums such as regional workshops. They highlighted the importance of using existing networks, preferably with someone who is 'well known and respected in the community' acting as a conduit.

Some basic principles to follow in developing messages for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are:

- Don't tell them what to do; look at it from their point of view.
- Don't use Aboriginal lingo, broken words etc.
- Use clear, distinct, simple, and straightforward language.

- Be natural and mean it.
- Consider what's in it for them.
- Don't overstate the issue.
- Don't pretend that you're not government.

*Look at the benefits for them in their lives, not just as a policy to recommend. (Indigenous stakeholder, Sydney)*

### 8.2.5 Additional consultants' comments

The Indigenous research consultants believe that:

- Face-to-face communication is definitely preferred.
- Online social networking (Bebo, Facebook etc) is popular and increasing.
- SMS (text messaging) is extremely popular (cost, ease, pre-paid deals, no need for hardware for online).
- Voice mobile calls are also popular (but highly dependent on current financial circumstances, credit etc).
- Local and age-specific language is prevalent.
- Mixing of cultures and communities (e.g. mixed ethnicity football teams, classrooms etc) enhances communication.
- Note that platforms of communication (SMS, mobile phone, Facebook) regardless of location, and distance are becoming less of an issue due to improvements of technology.
- Remote locations tend to have limited numbers of articulate, connected, stable young people who operate within the community environment and connect externally to programs and other issues (e.g. through school or sport and recreation programs, health service work and the Community Development Employment Projects program).

In communicating with Indigenous young people, government should:

- accommodate their desire for face-to-face contact, particularly in the beginning phases, perhaps through regional meetings combined with selected community contacts
- recognise that its credibility depends on face-to-face contact—if it just mails materials or posts them online it will be viewed as lazy and impersonal. It will also be seen as sending the message that young Indigenous Australians are not important enough to talk to directly.
- use sectors with existing networks, credibility and capacity—schools for those still in them, employment programs for those involved in them, youth programs for those not in any other setting, mental health for at-risk young people
- do not expect young people to trust or immediately perceive a benefit of a program, message or issue
- do not speak down to young people or 'dumb down' answers
- respect stories and allow people time to give their experience of life
- adapt communications for Indigenous people from different locations (urban, regional and remote)

- engage them by
  - using role models, some celebrities (carefully)
  - giving positive messages
  - using schools, which are a good message channel
  - using a local perspective where possible.

## 8.3 Technology and communication

### 8.3.1 Overall

Participants acknowledged the many benefits of technology, highlighting the ways in which technology facilitated communication and served as an antidote to isolation. Mobile phones were integral to feeling connected with a friendship network and community. Interestingly, this audience is heavily reliant on mobile phone and internet from a young age, with participants as young as 15 using SMS and internet as a substitute for face-to-face contact.

One young female participant who did not have enough money to catch the bus to visit friends in school holidays, commented:

*It's cheaper and quicker to send a text. (Female, 15–17 years)*

Some participants were enthusiastic about the internet:

*When the internet is down, the whole world falls apart! (Female, 22–24 years)*

However, cost and access were mentioned as deterrents to internet use. There was also recognition among some participants that the venues that provide internet access do not encourage social networking and that:

*Young Kooris need to stay connected with their communities. (Male, 18–21 years)*

In addition to mobile phones, laptops and iPods were frequently used. There was a high correlation between ease of internet access and frequency of use. Most did not have internet access at home but relied on family, friends, the library or internet cafes.

When face-to-face communication is not possible, the majority would prefer to receive communication through the post. However, when responding to communication they have received, Indigenous young people would prefer to use the phone or email. Some conceded that SMS was a convenient way for organisations to communicate with them; others distrusted an SMS that was impersonal.

Although this research did not include participants in very remote locations, the discussion touched on what Indigenous young people perceived to be barriers to communication for those in remote communities. The research found that due to the lack of mobile phone network coverage and internet reception there was a need for resources such as landline phones and payphones that work in remote communities.

### 8.3.2 Stakeholders

Stakeholders were making use of technology by emailing information using distribution lists to past and current participants and also wider network groups.

They saw this as an easy and cost-effective way to cast the net and capture a large audience. In addition, active participation on sites such as Facebook was used as a way to stay abreast of current trends.

*The Aboriginal community is a big networking community, everyone's related, so what those sort of sites (Facebook) offer is very attractive to kids. (Stakeholder, Sydney)*

Stakeholders also identified an opportunity to further leverage technology to encourage active communication between government and Indigenous young people, empowering this audience to participate in creating messages relevant and appropriate to them, such as making DVDs on drink-driving.

### 8.3.3 Additional consultants' comments

Other considerations include:

- Technology is a huge influence on Indigenous young people, who are major uptakers of technology regardless of socioeconomic status, location, and geography. It is used to confirm/arrange face-to-face or other forms of connection.
- The common uses of technology include
  - SMS
  - Facebook
  - MySpace
  - mobile phone
  - personalised informal email
  - email
  - webpages (for information trawling and direction; however, they require pointers or references from other peers or services).

## 8.4 Government communication

### 8.4.1 In general

Indigenous young people were ambivalent in their perceptions of government. While they acknowledged government's role in supporting them by funding their education, workplace training, employment and housing, as well as its critical role in providing law and order, they saw government as being removed.

*It's very hard talking to the police, they have no trust and every blackfella is guilty.*  
(Male, 22–24 years)

*One person decides everything for 'our people'—there needs to be an Indigenous council to help decide what is best for 'our people'.* (Male, 18–21 years)

The research found that Indigenous young people perceived that government also fulfilled the key role of providing public information and education and there was universal agreement that government communication was important.

Recall of specific government communication was low, with some citing Centrelink mail-outs. Social marketing interventions—in particular, binge drinking, speeding and domestic violence campaigns—had gained traction among a minority of participants. There was overwhelming agreement that the most effective way to communicate with Indigenous young people is through interactive face-to-face channels:

- community consultation forums
- programs in schools
- information sessions/seminars

- spokespeople
- mentors
- Indigenous representation and conduits at the grassroots level.

There was a sense that this segment wanted to feel heard and understood by government and not be spoken down to with communication that comes from the top down. There was also mention of the need to include greater Indigenous representation in media interventions and in government.

*We need more black people in government, more black faces in the spotlight. (Male, 18–21 years)*

*A young Aboriginal girl in Moree, you're not going to get her with just traditional Aboriginal iconography, she's a young woman, she's got hopes and dreams and aspirations, she wants to be beautiful, she wants to be like the girls in the magazines. She sees herself as being a good mother in the future, she sees herself being part of the Aboriginal community, young, black and deadly. (Stakeholder, Sydney)*

When thinking of government, the participants stated they only thought of the federal government as 'government', with references to Kevin Rudd and John Howard. There was little awareness of or differentiation between the different levels of government. Some participants were able to name local and state members, but did not regard them highly.

### 8.4.2 Stakeholders

Stakeholder interviews confirmed that Indigenous young people are disengaged from and disillusioned with government in general.

*...they want to know what the Government is going to do for them individually as well as for all Indigenous youth, how Government is going to make their lives easier, what the Government is planning and how it is going to effect them. (Stakeholder, NT)*

*You've got to look at the whole environment from their perspective first. You've got to let go a little bit of constantly trying to deliver the Government message, once you get in the right vein, it's a lot easier to get the message across. (Stakeholder, Sydney)*

*Because Government plays a larger part in Aboriginal people's lives than in non-Aboriginal people's lives, young kids are more savvy to the way the Government works, than possibly the non-Indigenous kids. (Stakeholder, Sydney)*

Despite the rhetoric of consultation, Indigenous young people did not feel connected to the process or that the policies directed to them have made a difference.

### 8.4.3 Additional consultants' comments

*Perceptions of government*

- Apart from a limited number of high-capacity, high-interest individuals and networks, as with mainstream young people, Indigenous young people tend to have high levels of disconnection from, lack of interest in and mistrust of government. There are assumptions that they have no role or will not be listened to, assumptions not dissimilar to those of other young Australians.
- There is an extremely limited understanding of government (what it is/is not, how it operates, levels of government etc). Therefore government was generally seen as negative or road blocking, and was not familiar to many Indigenous young people.
- Occasionally government was viewed as a 'money source'.

### *Government communication and messages for Indigenous young people*

- Government communication has an impact but is generally not sought out or assessed unless personal or having local relevance (e.g. funding program or event).
- Building trust is paramount. Government should seek to build and foster a relationship with Indigenous young people through listening and developing an understanding of their diversity and their circumstances. Don't put them all in the same basket and don't blame them as the cause or symptom.
- Generally, Indigenous young people are aware of government messages, but they are active filterers of information based on relevance.
- Barriers to communication include access, interest, time, depth, presenter, method, style and relevance.
- To effectively communicate, government needs to identify what and why there is a need to communicate (clear goals, assumptions and parameters), use appropriate forums, technology, and timing, and allow time for Indigenous young people to organise and respond.
- There should be flexibility and possibility of feedback prior to consultations, events and decisions (i.e. empower where appropriate and outline non-negotiables). There should also be a provision of higher access and support for those with capacity or specific issue–focus (e.g. violence, housing, health). Actively connect with homeless, incarcerated and the disengaged.

### *Issues that Indigenous young people need to hear from government*

- All issues need to be heard, as Indigenous young people are citizens and should not be spoonfed approved information only. These should be provided direct to whole range of community, social and political issues and discussions.
- Indigenous young people should be included in forums and discussions as people, not simply as a 'tick a box'.

Specific issues include major impacts such as education, welfare, training, employment, housing, credit, civic engagement, community leadership, personal development, personal identification, voting/enrolment, social participation, legal assistance, cultural heritage and legal rights.

## **8.5 Demographic comparisons**

### **8.5.1 Geographic location**

The findings suggest that regional participants are more likely than those in urban areas to mention youth services as a key influence on them; in particular, Mission Australia and MAX Employment.

In general, regional participants were more likely to rely on community events and community radio for social networking. Regional respondents perceived radio as a trusted source of information; those in urban settings perceived it as being eclipsed by television as a source of information. Participants in this research highlighted the importance of community radio as a means of communicating with remote Indigenous young people.

One example of effective use of radio to reach remote Indigenous young people was raised in the stakeholder interviews:

*While trying to contact a participant from Palm Island, we tried all contact numbers, tried numbers of friends and family and had no luck contacting the participant. Another participant put a 'shout out' over the radio station and from another friend hearing this was able to get in touch with the participant who was then contacted by the Office for Youth.*

Unprompted mention of the integral role of alcohol as a social lubricant differentiated regional participants from their urban counterparts. When asked what kinds of communication they use, the response was as follows:

*Getting drunk...then it's no shame. (Female, 22–24 years)*

While both regional and urban participants relied heavily on mobile phones and the internet to communicate with friends and family, urban participants were more likely than their regional counterparts to have internet access at home, facilitating more frequent and regular use.

### 8.5.2 Gender

Perceptions about key influences differed among male and female participants, with males more likely to recognise negative peer pressure and to cite sportspeople as a key influence. Females on the other hand, were more likely to defer to parents and family members.

While males and females were equally likely to use mobile phones and the internet to communicate with friends and family, consumption patterns differed slightly, with males more likely to access gaming and entertainment programs such as PlayStation 3 and Xbox. Females were more likely to cite magazines as a preferred media source. For younger females (15–17 years) *WHO*, *NW*, *Girlfriend*, *Cleo* and *Cosmopolitan* were top of mind. Males on the other hand expressed a preference for television programs such as *Barefoot Rugby* and for sports channels.

### 8.5.3 Age

In general, participants younger than 18 years had little or no communication with government and no knowledge of government communications. Participants over 18 years had more knowledge of government and more contact with government.

Age was clearly a factor in motivating Indigenous young people to become informed. Indigenous young people realised it was inevitable that, as they get older, they would come to rely, to a greater or lesser extent, on government for employment, education, workplace training and, in some cases, housing.

Recall of specific social marketing interventions was higher among participants 18 and over, reflecting the targeting of these campaigns.

Younger participants (15–17 years) recognised the opportunity for government to communicate with them via school visits and programs integrated in school curriculum. In this context they are a captive audience and government can leverage the opportunity for high-impact, high-involvement initiatives.

## Appendix 1: Discussion/interview guide

- Who are young people? How can they be grouped? Demographically? Attitudinally? Behaviourally?
- What groupings or segments exist that are relevant to effective communication?
- Can young people living in (i) rural, (ii) regional and (iii) remote Australia be regarded as one segment or do multiple segments exist?
  - If the latter, what are these segments?
  - Are there special sub-audiences (cross-cultural, e.g. rural Indigenous, rural, LOTE background, young people with disability) within non-urban young people?
- Do young people see themselves as one homogeneous group to be communicated with in one way? If not, how should young people be targeted most effectively by their subgroups?
- If there are subgroups, what are the best channels of communication for each subgroup, and which have the most cross-over?
- What are young people influenced by?
- Do different young people have different communication needs (e.g. rural vs urban)?
- Does music/fashion/lifestyle/psychological profile influence the way young people view government messages?
- What are the differences in media consumption and/or attitudes between the different segments?
- Examine the way young people communicate:
  - with themselves
  - with parents
  - with other (non-peer) adults
  - with government
  - with other public authorities/groups.
- What factors are important in communicating with young people?
  - Are there any differences in terms of age, gender, education, residential location etc?
- Do young people in rural areas react differently to communication? Communicate differently?
- Are young people seen differently in (i) rural, (ii) regional and (iii) remote Australia in terms of age range (e.g. 12–35 years rather than 12–24 years) due to demographic differences between urban areas and rural?
- Do the communication needs of young people living in (i) rural, (ii) regional and (iii) remote Australia differ from those of young people living in the cities?
  - If they differ, how do they differ?
  - What additional strategies are required to ensure effective communication?
  - Are the channels for communication the same or different?
  - Is access to the internet an issue for this target group (e.g. reliance of satellite, lack of broadband)?

Is the culture of young people living in (i) rural, (ii) regional and (iii) remote Australia sufficiently different from those of young people living in the cities that different materials or mediums for communication are required? That is, do cultural or attitudinal differences exist which therefore demand different engagement strategies?

- What is the role of technology?
- What is their use of and access to new and emerging information technology? For instance, do young people's attitudes to new technology make a difference to their usage or uptake of messages delivered that way?
- What are the preferred online and mobile technologies that young people use to participate in civic and political activities to influence government decision making and policy development?
- Are young people more likely to participate as consumers, creators or networkers when they use online and mobile technologies to participate in civic and political activities?
  - What other ways do they use these technologies to actively participate in their communities (including geographic communities and communities of interest)?
- How can the government best communicate with young people?
  - What issues/messages are important?
  - What is the best vehicle for these messages?
  - Do messages (and vehicles) vary according to type of group?
- What are the expectations of young people using government websites, particularly in regard to how young people expect government to respond to/feedback on issues they raise online?
- Does government's willingness and ability to use these technologies to engage young people in civic and political activity contribute to or enhance long-term capacities and interest of young people to continue civic/political activities into adulthood, such as enrolling to vote at 18?
- Given the current technological opportunities in Web 2.0, what have been the barriers to government in using these technologies to engage young people in participatory democracy?
- 'eDemocracy places too much emphasis on the centrality of government. Technology is used to preserve the status quo rather than transforming it.' Should government websites be the providers of online opportunities for young people's civic participation or should government engage other organisations/young people to create/build upon:
  - Their own online space to participate in decision making on issues that affect them?
  - Are there examples nationally and internationally of government effectively participating in citizen-developed and driven online dialogue and conversations to influence decision making and policy development?
- Do young people living in (i) rural, (ii) regional and (iii) remote Australia bring a different interpretative perspective to government communications (e.g. more or less trusting, see issues differently)?
- Do young people see Australian Government departments as separate agencies, or is it better to have one general 'Australian Government' approach?
- What information do young people want from government and how do they want to receive it?
- Do young people want the Australian Government to communicate 'on their level' or would they prefer a corporate, high-level, information-based approach?

- What existing government initiatives are young people aware of (particularly the Australian Youth Forum, National Youth Week and Vocational Education and Training)?
- What makes young people make the jump from information gathering to action (e.g. from hearing about a government-sponsored youth event to actually attending/registering)?
- Who do young Australians find inspiring/look up to?
- What are the barriers for young people to participate in civic/political activities and government decision making using the internet and mobile technologies? Examples may include:
  - technological understanding
  - access to technical infrastructure, computers, suitable internet connection and speed, current software
  - cultural beliefs/understanding
  - negative/ambivalent attitudes to government.
- How then can government address and remove these barriers to engage particular groups of young people who may be more likely to experience them (e.g. newly arrived young people, Indigenous young people, young people with disability, young people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and rurally isolated young people)?
- Is there support for a 'one-stop information gateway' for young people on the web, where all government information can be found?
- What are the key dimensions of an effective communication program for young people?
- What is the perception of government as a message source?
- What are the best ways to engage them in government communication?
- How is government perceived? Is government relevant? If not, how can government be perceived as relevant?
- How important is tone? What tone is most likely to be effective? Is there a tone that works well across the segments?
- Is it always important to clarify the key messages being conveyed?
- Do young people in rural areas engage differently to those in urban areas?
- Are there segments of the youth market that are disadvantaged in terms of access to government information; if so, who are they and what are the best ways to reach them? For example, rural young people, young Indigenous people and young people from LOTE backgrounds.
- What are the issues in communicating with these groups?

## Appendix 2: List of organisations included in the research

For some organisations more than one person was interviewed.

(**T**=Telephone, **F**= Face to Face)

### **Government**

Communications Advice Branch, Department of Finance and Deregulation (T)

Office for Youth, Victorian Government (F)

Roads and Traffic Authority, NSW Government (F)

Brisbane City Council: Visible Ink (F)

Department of Defence (T)

Australian Electoral Commission (T)

Australian Communications and Media Authority (T)

Traffic Accident Commission, Victoria (F)

### **Non-government organisations**

Youthsafe – Royal Rehabilitation Centre Sydney (F)

Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (T)

Youth Action and Policy Association, NSW (F)

National Heart Foundation, WA Division (F)

### **Culturally and linguistically diverse and/or Indigenous**

Cultural Partners (F)

Cultural & Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA) (F)

Vibe Australia (T)

Young Indigenous leaders Forum (Office for Youth, Queensland Government) (F)

National Indigenous Youth Movement of Australia (Junee, NSW) (F)

Danila Dilba Health Service (Palmerston, NT) (F)

### **Academic / Research**

KA Market Research Consultant Victoria (T)

University of NSW, Journalism and Media Research Centre (F)

Carroll Communications (F)

Victorian Health Research Consultant (T)

**Events / Music**

Mushroom Marketing (F)

TMA – Music and Events Consultancy (F)

Triple J (F)

**Advertising and Marketing Agencies**

Fresh (T)

Spin (F)

BMF (F)

Singleton Ogilvy Mather (F)

Frontier Media (F)

**Rural**

AgForce Future (T)

Local Intelligence (F)

YWCA, Downs and South West Queensland (T)

Dubbo City Council – Youth Development (F)

NSW Rural Women’s Network Coordinator (T)

Cattle Council of Australia / Sheepmeat Council of Australia – Media and Communications (T)

Tocal College (T)

Future Farmers Network (T)



