



Young Men's Media Landscaping Report

IN-DEPTH RESEARCH ON EMERGING TRENDS,
CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES



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- **Wonder&Wonder** (insights and strategy agency), who conducted the quantitative research data collection and analysis.
- **The Good Side**, who conducted the qualitative and digital listening field work.
- **Young Men's Research Initiative**, who supported the interpretation of findings and writing of this report.

SUGGESTED CITATION

"Fisher, Fisher, Sabgir, Smith, Seidler & Rice (2025) Young Men's Media Landscaping Report. Melbourne, Australia. Movember Institute of Men's Health"

ENQUIRIES

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Building on a 20-year legacy of investment in men's physical and mental health, The Movember Institute of Men's Health launched in 2023 and has ambitious goals to enhance quality of life for millions of men worldwide. Uniting global experts in the field of men's health, the Institute will accelerate research and translate it into tangible, real-world outcomes.

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Executive Summary

Young men increasingly inhabit their own unique digital ecosystems, navigating and consuming an immense volume of information and content every day. The world has started to take notice, sparking new conversations about the causes and implications of these online behaviours.

Despite this interest, basic underlying questions remain: Where are young men actually spending their time online? What kinds of content captures their attention? How are digital trends and new technologies reshaping their views on identity, relationships and society? By exploring these questions, we can better understand young men's information-seeking habits, media literacy, and the role of surrounding caregivers in helping young boys navigate this period of their lives.

This report explores online data from 3,783 young men aged 12 to 17 years old across six countries providing a comprehensive, nationally representative map of young men's digital ecosystems and key emergent trends - including the rise of podcasts and the increasing prominence of artificial intelligence in dating and relationships. By undertaking this big-picture analysis, the results ensure we are better equipped to not only understand and engage with this demographic, but also to support their health and wellbeing throughout this complex period in their lives.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this report are twofold:

1. Provide an in-depth overview of young men's online lives, needs, and habits.
2. Deliver timely, evidence-based, and actionable insights that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners can use to connect online beliefs and behaviours to relevant health issues facing young men.

METHODS

- This research was conducted through online surveys in six countries: the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and Canada. Each market included 700 respondents, except for Ireland (n=205).
- All respondents were boys aged 12 to 17 years.¹ Soft quotas were applied based on key social determinants of health, specifically, income and ethnicity, to ensure samples were representative of population-level splits in determinants for each country.
- Qualitative insights (focused specifically on online dating) were used to supplement the quantitative survey results. Focus groups with 78 young men across the UK, Australia, and Canada were undertaken alongside digital listening methodologies which offered deeper insights into how these digital ecosystems are shaping young men's attitudes, behaviours, and relationships.

¹We refer to the full 12 to 17 year old age group as "young men" throughout this report. Males aged 18 and over are referred to as "adult men" and "adult males."



Key Findings

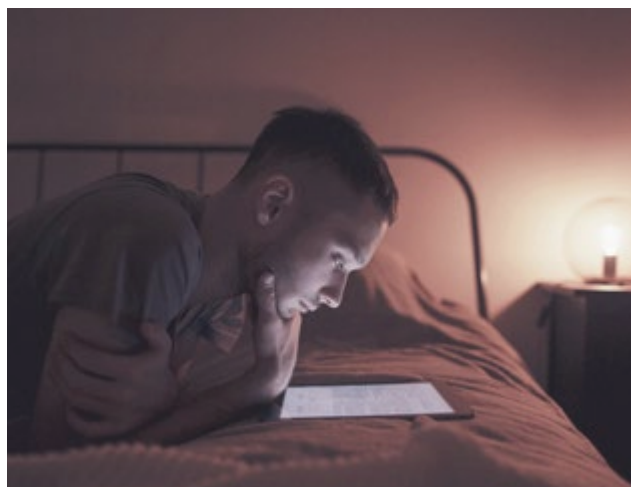
1. Young Men's Digital Landscape: Young men spend the majority of their online time gaming, with **88% playing video games at least once per week**. Beyond gaming, the most popular digital activities include watching short-form videos and using social media platforms; particularly YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Snapchat.
2. Algorithmic and Digital Literacy: **Just over half of young men (57%) say they do not understand how platforms decide what to show them, and a similar proportion (53%) want more control over the content they see**. These numbers vary considerably by country, but are relatively stable across ages. Parents are the most sought-after in-person source for verifying information online, ahead of teachers and friends.
3. The Rise of Podcasts: **Nearly half of young men (49%) report listening to podcasts at least once per week**, largely for entertainment and learning affordances. Video formats are especially popular. The Joe Rogan Experience is the leading podcast across markets, with preferences for other shows varying by country. With low-to-moderate trust in influencers across ages and demographics, podcasts still have the potential to shape beliefs and behaviours, especially when hosts are seen as credible in their domain.
4. The Role of Parents: Parents serve as a trusted source for health and relationship advice, and often act as online activity regulators. **40% of young men say their parents know everything they do on social media**, with time limits being the most common imposed restriction (45% report this). However, involvement tends to vary by specific activity. Parents tend to engage more with traditional media consumption like TV and radio, but are less involved with gaming and social media, precisely where young men spend most of their time.
5. Dating and Relationships: **One in ten young men use dating apps or websites** - this low rate aligns with platform regulations which require users to be at least 18 years old to register. Traditional sources (parents, friends) remain the most trusted for advice seeking on the topic; however, digital alternatives like Google and community forums (i.e., Reddit) are emerging as new avenues for crowd-sourcing questions and anonymous queries.
6. The Rise of AI: **Around two-thirds of young men (66%) now use ChatGPT - a remarkable rise for a tool that is only a few years old**. AI platforms are becoming central to young men's digital lives, offering both information and advice. From health and fitness programs to virtual companionship, these AI tools are broadening in both usage and scope.
7. Sociodemographic and Geographic Differences: **Platform engagement varies moderately across different socioeconomic groups**. Young men from low-income and non-urban backgrounds report being less influenced by comments and tend to show the highest trust in influencers. X shows a particularly significant gap: about one in three (32%) young men from high-income backgrounds report using it at least weekly, compared to 16% of young men from low-income households. Young men in the US and the UK report stronger understanding of algorithms and have a greater desire for feed control, whereas young men in New Zealand report less understanding and lower demand for control.

AI is rapidly changing young men's online lives – from how they find, trust, and act on information, to how they interact with others.

IMPLICATIONS

For sector partners and practitioners looking to engage young men, especially around mental health, masculine identity formation, and relationships, this research points to several potential strategies:

- 1. Establish a presence in the gaming world.** Young men spend more time gaming and consuming gaming content than any other media type. Engagement is high across age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. Expanding an organisation's gaming strategy and presence taps into a core part of young men's digital ecosystems and provides opportunities to promote health and safety.
- 2. Invest in media and algorithmic literacy campaigns.** Many young men don't understand how algorithms shape their feeds but are eager to learn more. Equipping them with knowledge of how algorithms work and the tools they can use to safely and effectively navigate digital environments, will create more informed choices and help them combat misinformation and harmful content.
- 3. Develop a clear video strategy, prioritising short-form content.** Short-form video is essential to most young men's media digital worlds, with YouTube and TikTok leading the way.
- 4. Educate and engage with parents.** Parents, particularly in low-income and non-urban communities, are a trusted source of advice and greatly influence young men's trust in the information they encounter online. Organisations should design digital literacy campaigns specifically for parents, creating programs that help them understand the spaces where young men are spending the majority of their time – mainly gaming, social media, and short-video platforms – and offer strategies to support healthy engagement.
- 5. Leverage trusted experts by topic.** Overall, young men place the most trust in people they view as specialists such as subject-matter experts for physical and mental health, athletes for fitness, and individuals with notable philanthropic backgrounds for charitable causes. While many of these online spaces are often crowded with influencers, campaigns can break through by spotlighting individuals with expertise and credibility, while utilising influencers' engagement strategies such as posting short-form videos, live interactive content, and maintaining a consistent online presence.
- 6. Understand and explore AI.** AI is rapidly changing young men's online lives – from how they find, trust, and act on information, to how they interact with others. Organisations should explore this space using a gender-responsive lens to understand the extent to which AI technologies are now changing young men's health. This can then provide vital insights on the ways to support the health and wellbeing of young men.



Introduction

Young men today are growing up in a digital environment unlike any generation before them. The constant presence of digital media, coupled with the rapid engineering of new digital technologies has transformed the ways boys and young men form their identities¹, connect with others, and seek out information. This shift has drawn increasing attention from researchers, policymakers, and community stakeholders who are seeking to understand both the challenges and opportunities these online spaces create for young men's health and wellbeing.

Over the past two decades, online spaces have become a central part of young men's lives. On average, young and adult men spend more than six hours online everyday²- consuming content and connecting with others. Screen time continues to increase as activities such as streaming music/podcasts, gaming, watching movies and communicating become fundamental parts of young men's daily routines. These online environments are often constructed by powerful algorithmically driven feeds³, tailoring content to each user's individual profile and engagement histories to create a highly personalised and frictionless user experience.

In young men's digital worlds, messages about what it means to be a man are omni-present. This shapes young men's experiences online (i.e., leading to a consumption of curated and hyper-personalised content) as well as the ways they understand and express masculinity offline. Men and masculinity influencers⁴ have proliferated in recent years. The content they create encompasses a range of men's lifestyle and culture interests including fitness tips, men's fashion inspiration, male self-improvement, financial tips to "get rich quick schemes" and dating or relationships advice. Some men and masculinity influencers linked to the "manosphere"⁵ to the promotion of harmful ideas and behaviours - including misogyny⁶ and obsessive or risky health behaviours (e.g., steroid use, self-harm suicide, or violence towards an intimate partner). This broad landscape of men and masculinity content⁷ on social media reflects the diverse and evolving ways young men's lifestyle and culture topics have moulded to resonate with the social and cultural pressures felt by many young men today. Recent research⁸ has also demonstrated that young men's engagement with men and masculinity content is shaping their health attitudes, behaviours and relationships offline.

Yet these digital worlds are also a powerful and transformative lifeline¹ for some young men. They can improve health literacy, allow young men to find community and create spaces where vulnerable emotional expression is possible without stigma⁹. Gaming, in particular, offers many isolated young men a space to open up and find empathy from others. One study¹⁰ from the US found that young men with more depressive symptoms and less real-life support were about 40% more likely to develop connections with other gamers in comparison to those with strong offline support. For many young men who face barriers to traditional help-seeking (e.g., social stigma, financial and geographical constraints) online spaces can offer accessible health information¹¹, instant connection with others and health support that may otherwise be out of reach.

Around the world, the growing ubiquity and influence of social media has prompted co-ordinated policy responses and calls for change. The US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy issued a General Advisory¹² in 2023, focused on social media's impacts on youth mental health, and the majority of US states have now enacted bans or restrictions on phone use in schools. The UK's Online Safety Act¹³ holds technology companies accountable for the content shown on their platforms, while Australia plans to implement age-verification¹⁴ for under¹⁶ year olds from most social media platforms starting in December 2025.

Against this research and policy backdrop, there is an urgent need for evidence-based approaches that protect young men (and their communities) from health risks online, while recognising the value of certain online communities and environments. By mapping the digital worlds of young men through research grounded in new empirical insights from six countries, we have developed a strong, nuanced foundation that centres lived experience and comprehensive data. It is upon this foundation that we can build practical policy and strategies for intervention, as well as guiding philanthropic, public health, government and community organisations to better understand and engage young men where they are - online. This research contributes to the growing understanding of how modern day technologies are fundamentally reshaping young men's lives, identities and communities, enabling us to support their health and wellbeing as they navigate these spaces.





Methodology

Movember partnered with a research and insights company Wonder&Wonder to collect and analyse responses to an online survey about young men's online behaviours across six Western countries: the US, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and Canada. Each market included 700 participants, with the exception of Ireland (n=205). All participants were adolescent males aged 12 to 17 years, with a relatively even distribution across age groups. These samples were nationally representative with respect to age, ethnicity, and income.

This quantitative research focused on three primary research questions:

- 1. How do young men engage with media, and what are their usage patterns?**
More specifically: how often, with whom, and in what contexts do they engage with different forms of media?
- 2. How do young men understand and behave on social media?** More specific questions include levels of literacy on social media, their sense of control and trust, and how that changes their behaviour. Key focus areas include podcasts, AI, news consumption, misinformation, dating, restrictions, and advertising.
- 3. What age and socio-demographic differences are evident (if any) within young men's social media behaviours and usage patterns?**

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH & DIGITAL LISTENING

To complement these quantitative findings, Movember partnered with The Good Side to conduct qualitative research in the UK, Australia, and Canada. This qualitative sample included 78 total participants, with roughly equal distribution across younger (13 to 15 years) and older (16 to 18 years) age groups. Qualitative insights were gathered through online community focus groups with approximately 20 young men per market to provide deeper context for understanding young men's digital experiences and behaviours.

Digital listening was also a central component of this work. This method involved analysing common search terms young men use on YouTube and TikTok and mapping their digital journey through reviewing conversations on Reddit and YouTube to identify common themes in their online interactions.

Movember partnered with a research and insights company Wonder&Wonder to collect and analyse responses to an online survey about young men's online behaviours across six Western countries: the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and Canada.

Digital Landscapes

Where are young men engaging online? For how long?

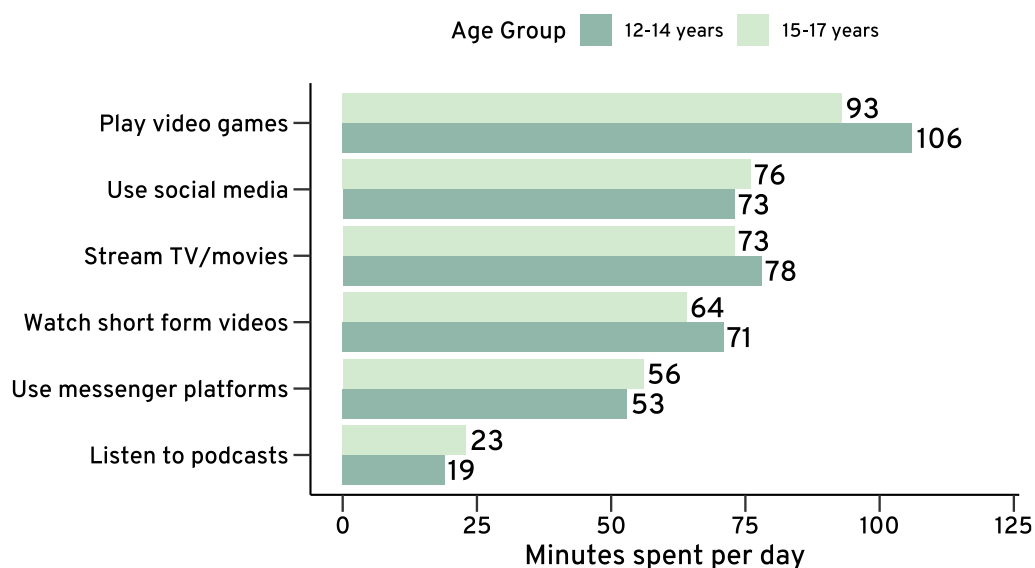
GAMING

Gaming accounts for the largest share of young men's daily digital time. 88% play at least once per week, with younger teens (12 to 14 years) averaging slightly more time (106 minutes) than older teens (15 to 17 years; 93 minutes). This represents one of the most time consuming activities for young men. Comparatively, only 48% of adult males² (18 to 65 years) engage in gaming at least once per week. This far exceeds the comparative adult male participation (ages 18 to 65 years; 48%) and represents one of the most time-consuming activities for young men.



FIGURE 1. TIME SPENT ON DIGITAL MEDIA

How much time do you spend each day doing the following?



² Comparative data from 18-65 year old men accessed from Mindshare's Audience Origins. Sample included men aged 18-65 in Australia (5,000), New Zealand (2,500), US (25,000), UK (10,000), Canada (5,000) and Ireland (1,250)"

Cycle

1

Messenger



Instagram

SOCIAL MEDIA

The vast majority of young men are active on social media. 85% report weekly usage, averaging about 1 hour and 15 minutes per day. This weekly rate of engagement is comparable to that of adult males (81%).

Short-form videos are especially popular. 88% of young men consume this content at least weekly, and about 59% daily. In comparison, 70% of adult men watch short-form videos at least once per week.

YouTube is the most widely used social media platform, with nearly four out of five young men (77%) using it at least once per week. Many are introduced to YouTube at a young age, often earlier than other social media platforms. Most report first using social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Reddit around age 12, while YouTube's use begins slightly earlier (between 10 and 11 years old). This could reflect the platform's emphasis on educational and kid-friendly content.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Traditional media resonates less with young men than adult males. Only 64% of young men watch live broadcast television at least weekly (albeit 84% stream TV shows/movies), compared to 89% of adult males (62% of whom stream TV shows/movies). Similarly, 59% of young men tune into traditional or satellite radio at least once per week, versus 81% of adult males.

YouTube is the most widely used social media platform, with nearly four out of five young men (77%) using it at least once per week.

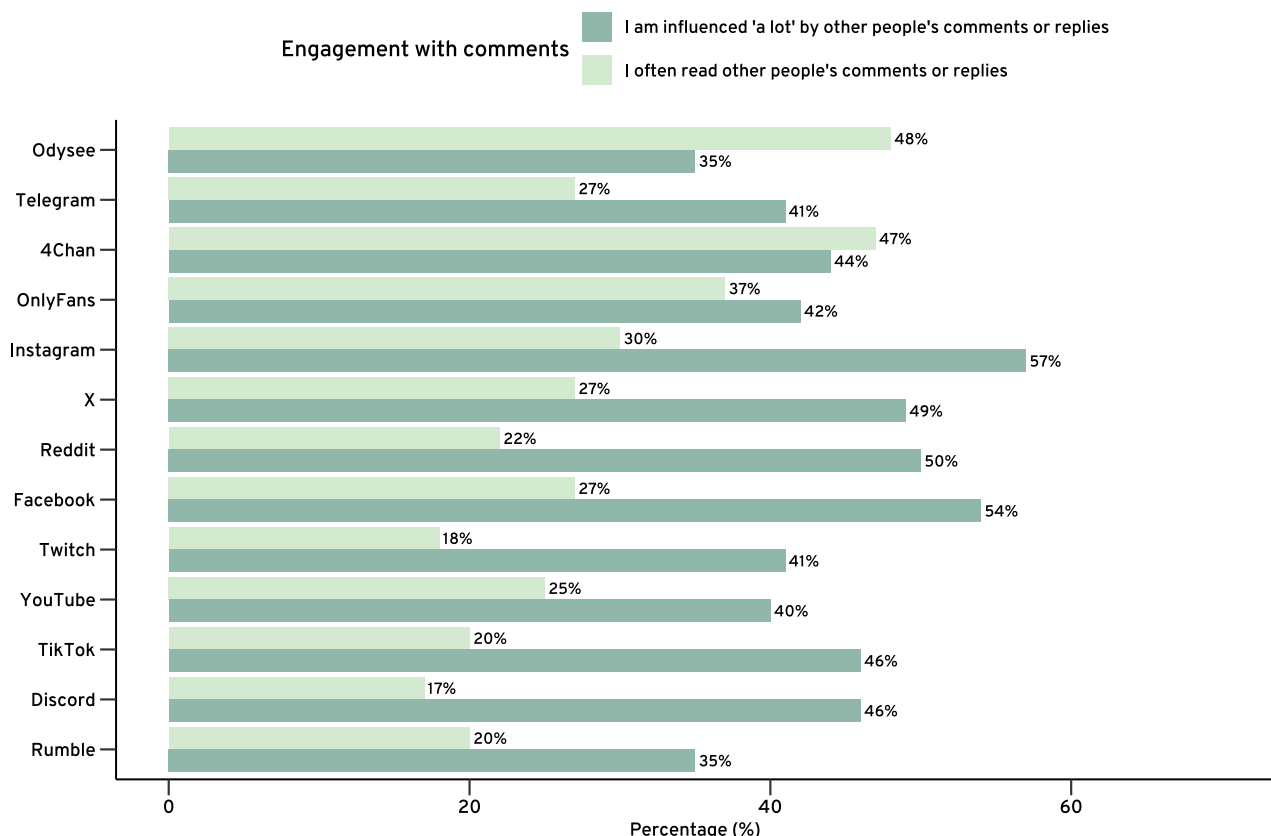
HOW DO BEHAVIOURS COMPARE ACROSS PLATFORMS?

Different platforms serve different functions and reveal varying levels of influence.

- **YouTube** users skew younger than other social media sites, and primarily use the platform for entertainment (56%), filling spare time (48%), and learning (40%).
- **TikTok** and **Twitch** are used mainly for entertainment and filling spare time.
- **Instagram's** popularity grows with age (67% of 15 to 17 year olds report weekly usage vs 54% of 12 to 14 year olds). Users also report greater fear-of-missing-out (FOMO) and social comparison as key factors driving their usage behaviours.
- **Reddit** users are generally older and use the site for a mix of purposes such as staying informed, seeking or offering advice, learning, entertainment and filling spare time.
- **Snapchat, Discord** and **WhatsApp** are most commonly used for staying in touch with close friends.

FIGURE 2. SOCIAL MEDIA COMMENTS

Influence of comments on social media



Young men pay the most attention to comments on Instagram, with 57% saying they ‘often’ read others’ comments or replies. Following in comment readership are Facebook (54%), Reddit (50%), X (Twitter, 49%), and TikTok (46%). While fringe platforms like Odysee, 4Chan, and OnlyFans have the lowest overall engagement rates, they exert significant influence on the young men who do use them (particularly those aged 12 to 14 years).

57% of young men say they often read others’ comments or replies on Instagram.

WHO ARE THE TOP INFLUENCERS?

There is a high degree of variation within the top influencers, with no single individual dominating their respective category. Matthew Hussey (15%, Dating/Relationships) and MrBeast (14%, Charities/Causes) have the highest overall recognition rates, with the second highest lagging far behind. The charities/causes influencers have the most diverse backgrounds: MrBeast’s fame comes from YouTube; Leonardo DiCaprio and Emma Watson from film and activism; Bill Gates from business and philanthropy, and Malala Yousafzai from her background in education and activism. There is minor overlap across categories: Joe Wicks and Cristiano Ronaldo appear in both health and fitness, and MrBeast in mental health and charities/causes.



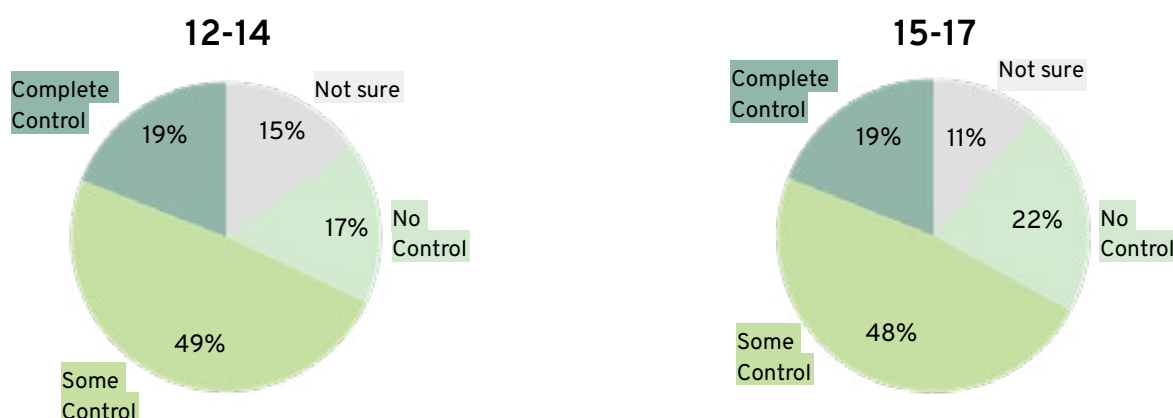
Algorithmic and Digital Literacy

Just over half of young men (57%) say they do not understand how platforms decide what to show them, and a similar proportion (53%) want more control over the content they see.



FIGURE 3. YOUNG MEN'S ALGORITHMIC LITERACY

How much control do you think you have over the content you're shown on social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok and Twitter?



Young men across age subgroups share similar perceptions of their control over social media content. About one in five believe they have complete control (19% overall), similar proportions believe they have no control (20%), and about half believe they have some control (48%). However, these numbers vary considerably by country, as detailed in the *Socio-Demographic and Geographic Differences* section.

Algorithmic literacy and the desire for more control are also similar across age groups. 57% of young men say they do not understand how platforms decide what content to show them, and over half (53%) express a desire for more control. Despite their overall limited comprehension, many demonstrate awareness of discrete factors that influence content curation, citing terms like “algorithm” (19%), “searched” (17%), “watched” (17%), “history” (7%), and “likes” (5%).

Many young men actively verify the “truth” of information they encounter online. The most common fact-checking methods include: consulting with a parent (56%), using a search (50%) and checking with a friend (29%) or a teacher (26%). For health information specifically, cross-checking against other sources (44%) and considering information source quality (35%) are also common strategies.

56% of young men said they would go to their parents to check whether information they saw online was true or not.

The Rise of Podcasts

Podcasts have become a central space for young men's education, entertainment and sense of connection. Roughly half (49%) of all young men listen to podcasts at least once a week.



Sports, music, games/hobbies, comedy, and technology are the most popular podcast categories, though listenership spans an even wider range of categories. Across age groups, the top channels are consistent: The Joe Rogan Experience, Stuff You Should Know, The Daily, and Crime Junkie. Video format is most popular among podcast-consuming young men (37%), closely followed by interview-based (36%) shows.

Entertainment (50%), learning something new (42%), and relaxation (38%) are the most cited reasons young men listen to podcasts. Many also turn to podcasts to stay informed or be inspired, while accessing gossip was the least common reason (16%).

Spotify and YouTube are the primary avenues for podcast consumption. Over half of podcast-listening young men use Spotify (53%), slightly more than those who use YouTube Video. SoundCloud (11%), iHeartRadio (8%), Tidal (3%), CBC Listen (2%), and LiSTNR (1%) are among the least utilised platforms.

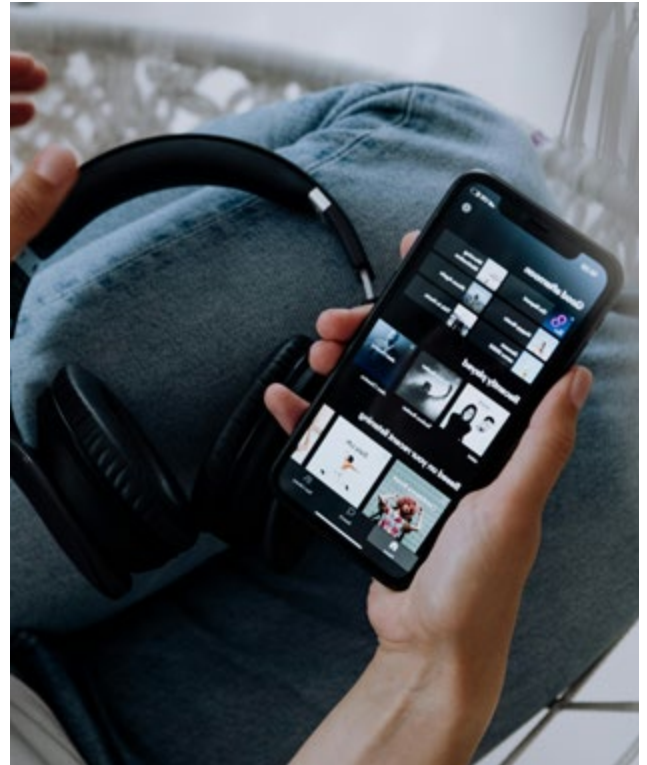
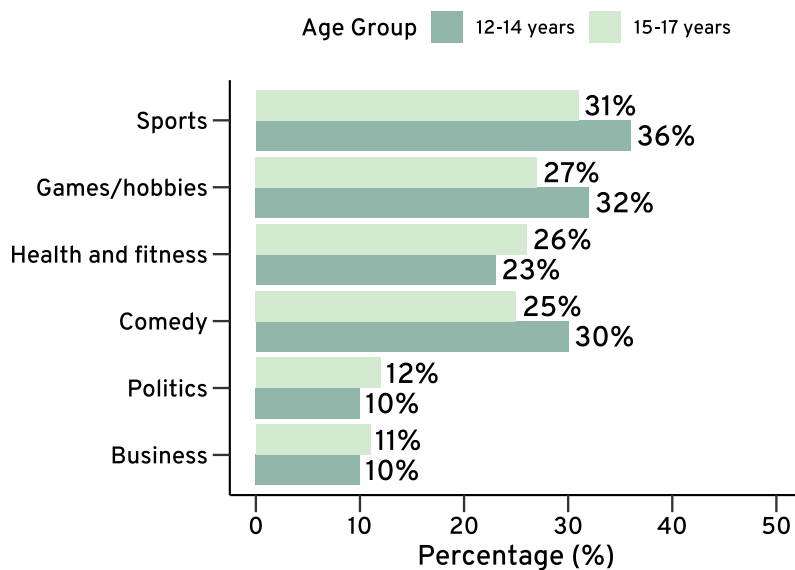


FIGURE 4. PODCAST CATEGORIES

What do you listen to podcasts about?



The Role of Parents

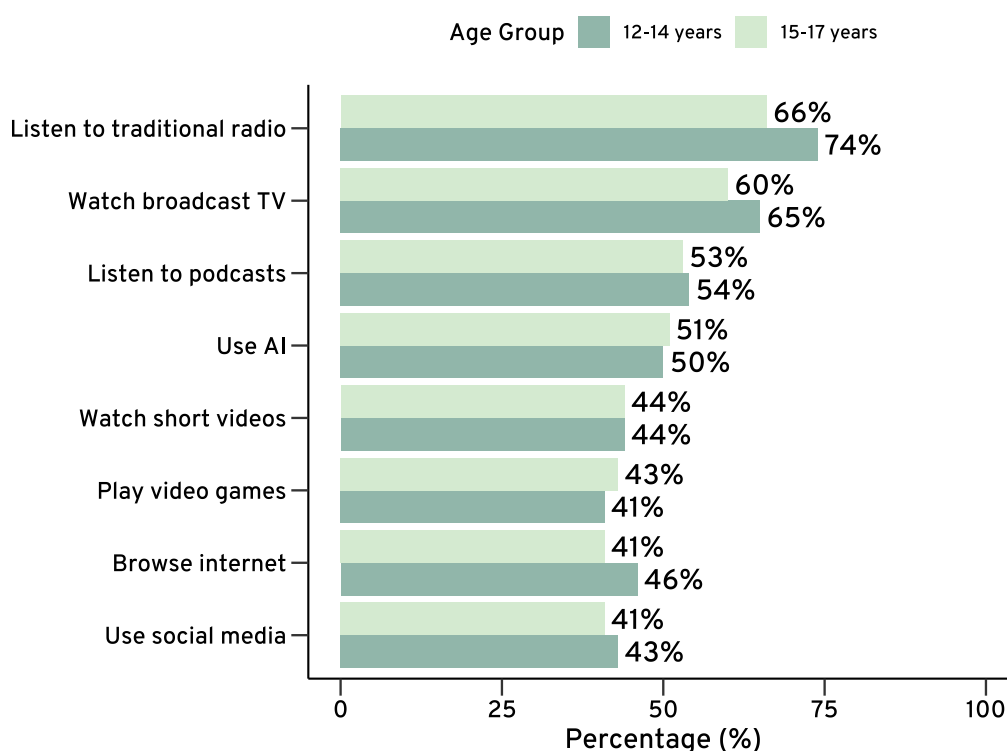
From setting screen time limits to monitoring social media use, parents play a crucial role in regulating and safeguarding young men's digital media consumption.



Many parents stay informed about their sons' social media activity and serve as trusted sources for verifying information found online. However, parental involvement tends to be lowest in the digital spaces where young men spend the bulk of their time.

FIGURE 5. THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN YOUNG MEN'S DIGITAL WORLDS

How often do you do each of the following with your parents?

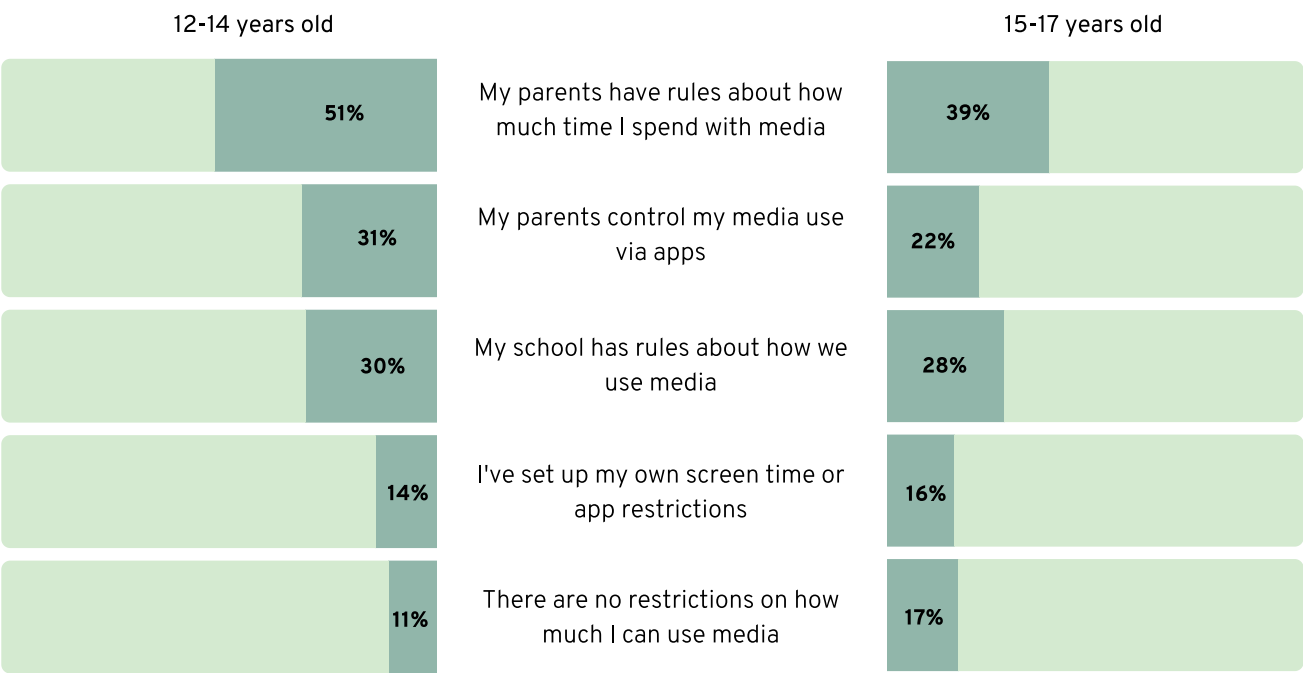


Relatively few young men (14%) report no media restrictions. Time limits are the most common (45%), while roughly three in ten (29%) say their school imposes its own requirements. **Less than half of young men (40%) say their parents are fully aware of their social media activities,** while just over half (56%) say their parents have some knowledge of their online activities.

Parents are more present in traditional media activities than digital ones. 62% of young men say they 'often' or 'always' watch live broadcast TV with their parents, while only 42% say the same for gaming. Though parental involvement dips for the most popular online spaces like gaming and social media, these numbers still reflect meaningful levels of engagement.

FIGURE 6. PARENTAL CONTROLS

Are there any restrictions on how much you use media (e.g. watch TV, use phone)?

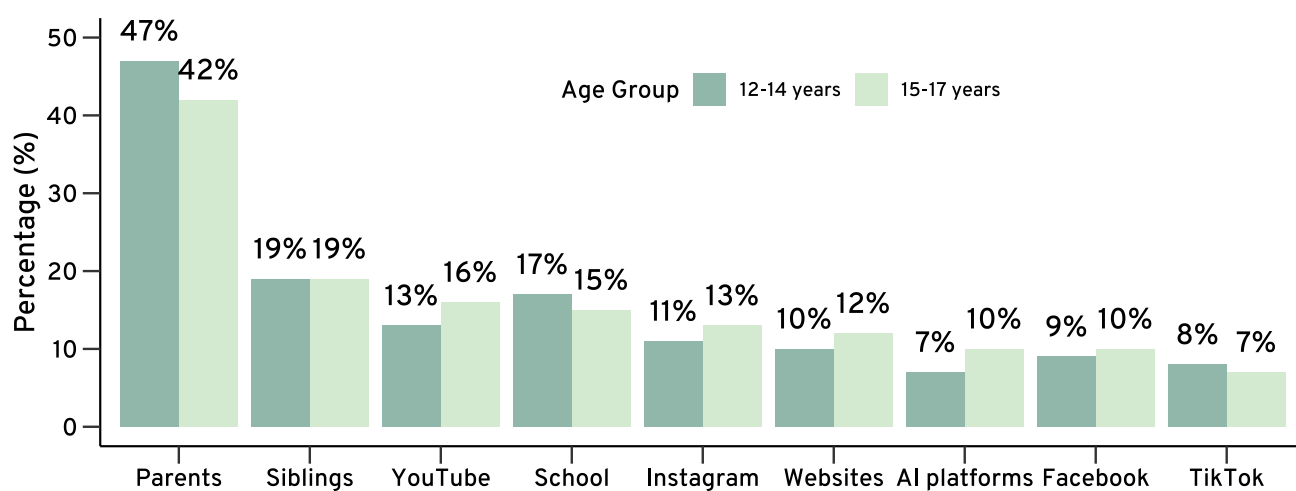


Parents are a key source of dating and relationship advice. While young men consult friends at roughly the same rate for dating and relationship guidance (44% seek advice from parents, 46% from friends), the overwhelming majority (92%) say they trust their parents ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’, slightly higher than friends (84%) and the highest trust level overall. Young men often turn to their parents for wisdom during difficult times and for guidance on broader life questions (e.g., values, how to balance competing priorities). Friends, on the other hand, often provide day-to-day advice and serve as a reference point for social norms (e.g., “Is it normal to kiss a girl on the first date?”)

Less than half of young men (40%) say their parents are fully aware of their social media activities

FIGURE 7. DATING AND RELATIONSHIP ADVICE

Where do you get advice on dating and relationships?

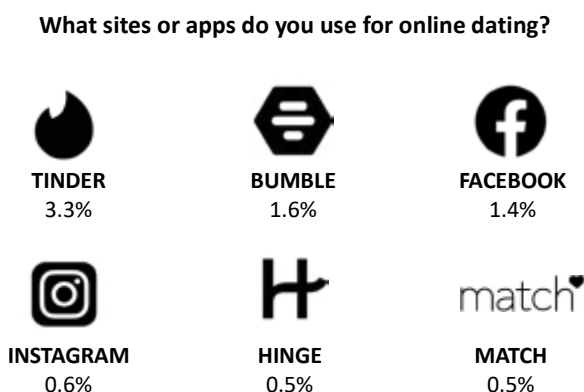


Dating and Relationships

Young men across socio-demographic groups use dating apps at relatively low rates, which is unsurprising given that these platforms require users to be at least 18 years old.

While young men trust traditional sources (parents, friends) most for seeking advice, digital platforms like Google, YouTube, and Reddit are emerging as outlets for anonymous queries and crowd-sourced opinions. Notably, young men show higher trust in influencers for dating advice (26%) compared to other information categories (health, fitness, mental health, charities/causes).

FIGURE 8. ONLINE DATING



Despite these age restrictions, about one in ten young men uses dating sites. Tinder is the most popular (3%), followed by Bumble (2%) and Facebook (1%). Interestingly, young men occasionally use social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram for dating purposes, though overall usage across all platforms remains minimal.

Despite the availability of online relationship resources, young men tend to place limited trust in their reliability. Overall, about one in four (26%) young men says they trust influencers for dating advice. While relatively low, this level of trust is higher for dating advice than other information sources, including subject matter experts (24%) and celebrities (19%). The most commonly cited individuals that young men trust are Matthew Hussey (15%), Esther Perel (5%), Derrick Jaxn (2%), Dr. Phil (2%), and Mark Manson (2%). Notably, some of these influencers, such as Dr. Phil and Esther Perel, may also qualify as subject-matter experts.

REDDIT, A DIGITAL BEST MATE

Through qualitative interviews with 78 young men across Australia, the UK and Canada, Reddit was identified as a key source of both practical and emotional support for young men navigating dating and relationships.

- Young men valued Reddit's open and anonymous format, which allowed them to hear relatable stories from others.
- Reddit communities and discussions helped young men interpret social norms, judge their emotional readiness for dating, and troubleshoot situational challenges.
- However, the platform's anonymity and the conflicting or inflammatory opinions left some young men unsure about the credibility of advice offered.
- Platforms like Quora and WikiHow offered young men more curated step-by-step guidance, but were seen as less engaging and relatable in comparison to Reddit.

"I looked up how to talk to women you have interest in on Reddit. It received tons of advice but it was difficult to get a straight universal answer."

— Canadian young man, 16 to 18 years

"Reddit is an excellent platform. You can relate to and talk to people in the same boat which makes me feel a lot more comfortable."

— UK young man, 16 to 18 years

Refer to Methods on pg 13. Qualitative insights were gathered through online community focus groups with approximately 20 young men in Australia, UK and Canada aged 13 to 18 years.

The Rise of Artificial Intelligence



Artificial intelligence is rapidly gaining traction among young men, with about three in five (61%) using AI platforms at least weekly. New applications tailored to unique purposes - including information-seeking, entertainment, and dating advice - are being quickly adopted.

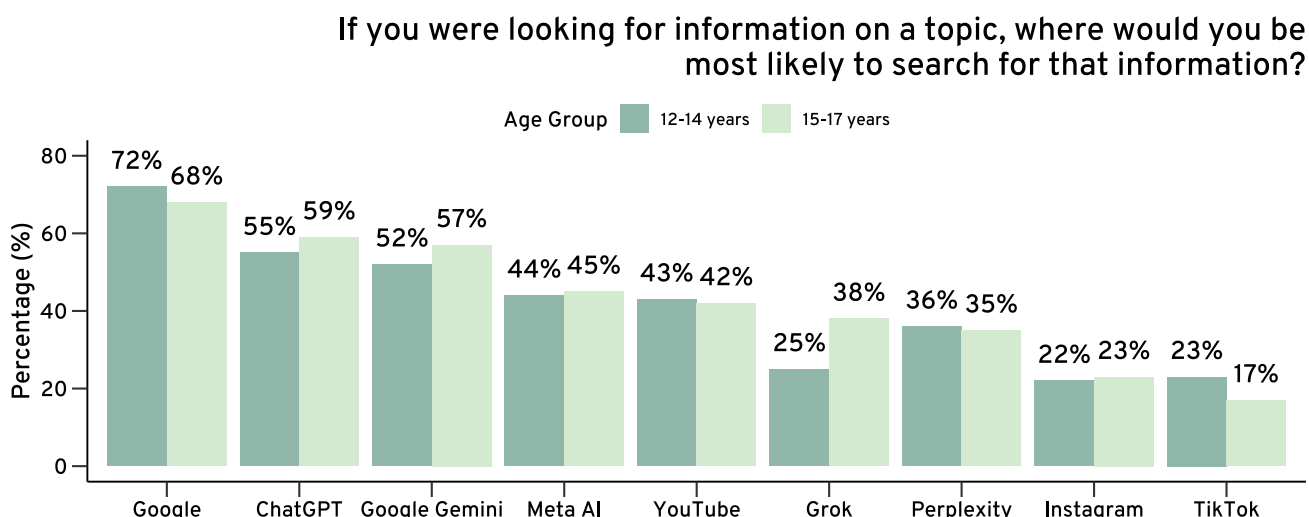


ChatGPT holds a commanding lead in AI platform usage. About two-thirds of young men (66%) use the platform, followed by Google Gemini (39%) and Meta AI (36%). Perplexity and Grok lag far behind, with just 4-5% of young men reporting use of these systems. The top reasons for utilising AI include general learning (48%), schoolwork (45%), and just for fun (42%).

More so than other digital activities, AI often involves parents. About 78% of young men say they “sometimes,” “often,” or “always” use AI with their parents, suggesting a higher level of co-engagement than any other digital activity. The exact ways in which young men use AI with their parents is unclear.

Artificial intelligence is rapidly gaining traction among young men, with about three in five (61%) using AI platforms at least weekly.

FIGURE 9. AI PLATFORMS



Still, Google remains the top choice for finding information, with around 70% of young men relying on it. Closely followed by this, ChatGPT (57%) and Google Gemini (55%) are also commonly used as search engines for information. Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and X are less frequently used for information seeking.



FROM ONLINE MATCHES TO AI MACHINES

Digital listening analysis revealed the expanding presence of AI on young men's dating, intimacy and relationships in 2024.

Young men are using AI tools to improve their profiles and performance in online dating.

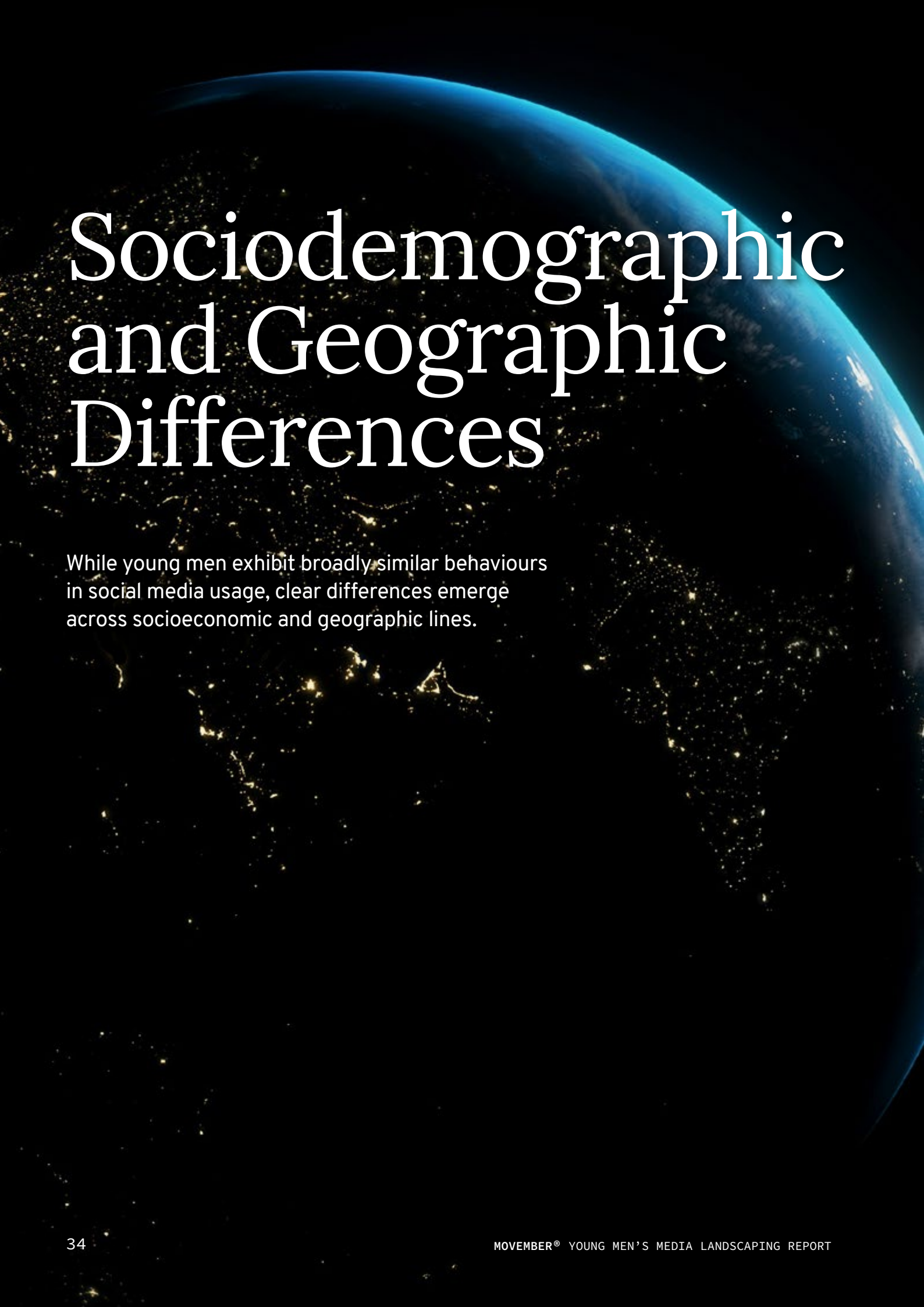
- **AI dating coach platforms like yourmove.ai have over 500,000 users per month**, offering AI-driven profile reviews, chat advice and profile photo enhancement. The top global audiences for these sites are India, US, UK, Canada and Australia.

Young men's engagement with AI companions is increasing, enabling them to role-play different romantic and intimate scenarios. The most common scenarios are inspired by anime and pornography with explicit or misogynistic themes.

- **Searches for AI girlfriends rose by 33% on TikTok and Youtube in 2024**, with the highest growth seen in Australia (47% increase in search volume).
- **AI companion sites attracted millions of monthly visitors:** candy.ai (~10.5 million users), pephop.ai (~5.7 million users), gptgirlfriend.online (~4.1 million users), and joyland.ai (~1.7 million users).
- **Young men aged 18 to 24 years are the primary users of AI companionship technologies.**
- **The most popular scenarios on AI companionship sites (e.g., Joyland.ai) had sexually explicit or misogynistic undertones:** "Unleashing your deepest fantasies" (~3.3 million messages), "she was kidnapped when she was 21 and is now 23" (~2.9 million messages), "he bullies you to catch his attention" (~2.8 million), "...a genuine sadistic bully, come at my mercy" (~1.1 million messages).

Refer to Methods on pg 13. Digital listening involved analysing common search terms young men use on platforms like YouTube and TikTok, mapping their digital pathways, and reviewing conversations on platforms like Reddit and YouTube to identify common themes in their online interactions.





Sociodemographic and Geographic Differences

While young men exhibit broadly similar behaviours in social media usage, clear differences emerge across socioeconomic and geographic lines.



SOCIOECONOMIC PATTERNS

Platform usage shows moderate differences across income groups.

X shows the largest disparity among major platforms: while 16% of low-household income (LHI) and 20% of medium-household income (MHI) young men use the app at least weekly, this figure rises to 32% among young men from high-household incomes (HHI). Reddit also shows higher engagement among the HHI group, with 18% using the app weekly compared to 11% of young men from LHI and MHI backgrounds.

Engagement with comments also varies meaningfully.

Young men from low-income backgrounds are less likely to report being influenced by others' comments or replies. For example, 74% of young men from HHI backgrounds say their opinions are influenced by comments they see on Instagram, compared to 61% of young men from LHI backgrounds. The high-to-low income gap appears across other major platforms (62% vs 49% on TikTok, 73% vs 58% on X, 67% vs 56% on Facebook).

Trust in influencers versus subject-matter-experts (SMEs) differs sharply by income.

Young men from LHI backgrounds tend to show the highest trust in influencers across categories. For example, 25% of LHI young men trust influencers for health information, which is seven to nine percentage points higher than those from MHI and HHI backgrounds. This pattern is similar across physical and mental health, charities/causes, fitness, and dating/relationships.

Despite their higher trust in influencers overall, young men from LHI backgrounds express lower trust in social platforms for dating advice compared to peers from HHI backgrounds.

For instance, 48% of LHI young men show some level of trust in Reddit for dating advice, compared to 53% of MHI and 67% of HHI young men. Similarly, 39% of LHI young men say they trust Twitch for dating advice, compared to 46% of MHI and 56% of HHI young men.

GEOGRAPHIC PATTERNS

Video content platforms are widely used across geographic backgrounds (rural, urban, suburban, suburban/urban), though usage is highest among rural and suburban groups.

Differences are modest for YouTube, with 81% of rural young men using the platform weekly compared to 78% of suburban and 75% of urban young men. The gap is slightly larger for TikTok: 57% of both rural and suburban young men use it at least weekly, compared to 46% of urban young men. Meanwhile, urban young men are the heaviest consumers of Instagram (68% use the platform weekly versus 54% of suburban and 44% of rural young men), X (28% urban versus 18% suburban and 13% rural), and WhatsApp (58% vs 53% and 37%, respectively).

Young men from urban backgrounds report the highest adoption of AI.

Overall usage of ChatGPT, the most popular platform, is high across groups: 69% of urban young men use the app, compared to 61% of rural and 60% of suburban young men. Meta AI shows a similarly narrow difference, with 40% of urban young men using it compared to 32% of rural and 30% of suburban young men. However, there is a more significant 20-point gap in urban-rural usage for Google Gemini (43% vs 23%).

Urban young men express the most confidence in identifying fake health information.

73% feel confident in their ability to detect false health information found online, compared to 65% of rural and 68% of suburban young men. While urban young men check source quality at similar rates to other groups when verifying health information found online (36% versus 33% of suburban and 34% of rural young men), they are least likely to ask their parents for verification (57% versus 66% and 67%, respectively).



Overall usage of ChatGPT, the most popular platform, is high across groups: 69% of urban young men use the app, compared to 61% of rural and 60% of suburban young men.

COUNTRY-LEVEL DIFFERENCES

While digital behaviours and top platforms are relatively consistent across countries, notable differences emerge in media and algorithmic literacy.

Young men in the US and the UK are far more likely to report understanding how social media platforms curate their content (about two-thirds say they understand in both markets), compared to just 17% in New Zealand. Young men in the US and the UK feel a greater sense of control over their feeds (75-80% believe they have ‘some’ or ‘complete’ control over the content shown on their ‘For You’ pages) and also report a strong desire for more control over the content seen (82-85% answered ‘yes’ to “Would you like to have more control over the content you might see on social media?”). In contrast, young men from New Zealand have extremely little desire for more control (18% answered ‘yes’ to the above question) despite feeling less empowered.

Health information seeking also varies across countries.

Young men in the US and the UK are most likely to search for health-related information (44-47% for physical health, 29-34% for mental health), while those in Canada and New Zealand show much lower rates (22-23% for physical health; 17-18% for mental health).

Top influencers show considerable overlap.

Dr. Mike Varshavski ranks among the top five cited health influencers in the US, the UK, Canada, New Zealand, and Ireland. Dr. Mark Hyman appears on the top five list for the US, the UK, Canada, Ireland, and Australia. Mental health influencers are more fragmented: MrBeast is recognized in the US, Ireland, and Canada, but no single name dominates. For dating and relationships, the leading name is clear: Matt Hussey, the British author and dating coach, is the most popular influencer across all markets.



Implications and Why This Matters

Young men's ability to effectively navigate these vast and virtual uncharted territories hinges on timely, rigorous and evidence-informed policy and interventions. Our research findings offer a foundation for such action, providing insights that can be used to guide policy development, practical support and targeted strategies for young men. This ensures we can harness the health opportunities digital technologies offer, while simultaneously mitigating risks to the health and wellbeing of young men and their broader communities.

There are six key implications from this study.

IMPLICATIONS

For sector partners and practitioners looking to engage young men, especially around mental health, identity formation, and relationships, this research points to several potential strategies:

- 1. Establish a presence in the gaming world.** Young men spend more time gaming and consuming gaming content than any other media type. Engagement is high across age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. Expanding an organisation's gaming strategy and presence taps into a core part of young men's digital ecosystems and provides opportunities to promote health and safety.
- 2. Invest in media and algorithmic literacy campaigns.** Many young men don't understand how algorithms shape their feeds but are eager to learn more. Equipping them with knowledge of how algorithms work and the tools they can use to safely and effectively navigate digital environments, will lead to more informed choices and help them combat misinformation and harmful content.
- 3. Develop a clear video strategy, prioritising short-form content.** Short-form video content is essential to most young men's media digital worlds, with YouTube and TikTok leading the way.

The online world is now a foundational part of young men's development, identity formation and relationships. It is where they socialise, form connections, gather information and seek advice. As this digital terrain evolves at an incomprehensible speed, its effects on young men's health and wellbeing are becoming indisputable - in both positive and negative ways.

4. **Educate and engage with parents.** Parents, particularly in low-income and non-urban communities, are a trusted source of advice and greatly influence young men's trust in the information they encounter online. Organisations should design digital literacy campaigns specifically for parents, creating programs that help them understand the spaces where young men are spending the majority of their time (mainly gaming, social media, and short-video platforms) and offer strategies to support healthy engagement.
5. **Leverage trusted experts by topic.** Overall, young men place the most trust in people they view as specialists: subject-matter experts for physical and mental health, athletes for fitness, and individuals with notable philanthropic backgrounds for charitable causes. While many of these online spaces are often crowded with influencers, campaigns can break through by spotlighting individuals with expertise and credibility while utilising influencers' engagement strategies such as posting short-form videos, live interactive content, and maintaining a consistent online presence.
6. **Understand and explore AI.** AI is rapidly changing young men's online lives- how they find, trust, and act on information, and how they interact with others online. Organisations should explore this space using a gender-responsive lens to understand the extent to which AI technologies are now changing young men's health. This can then provide vital insights on the ways to support the health and wellbeing of young men.

CONCLUSION

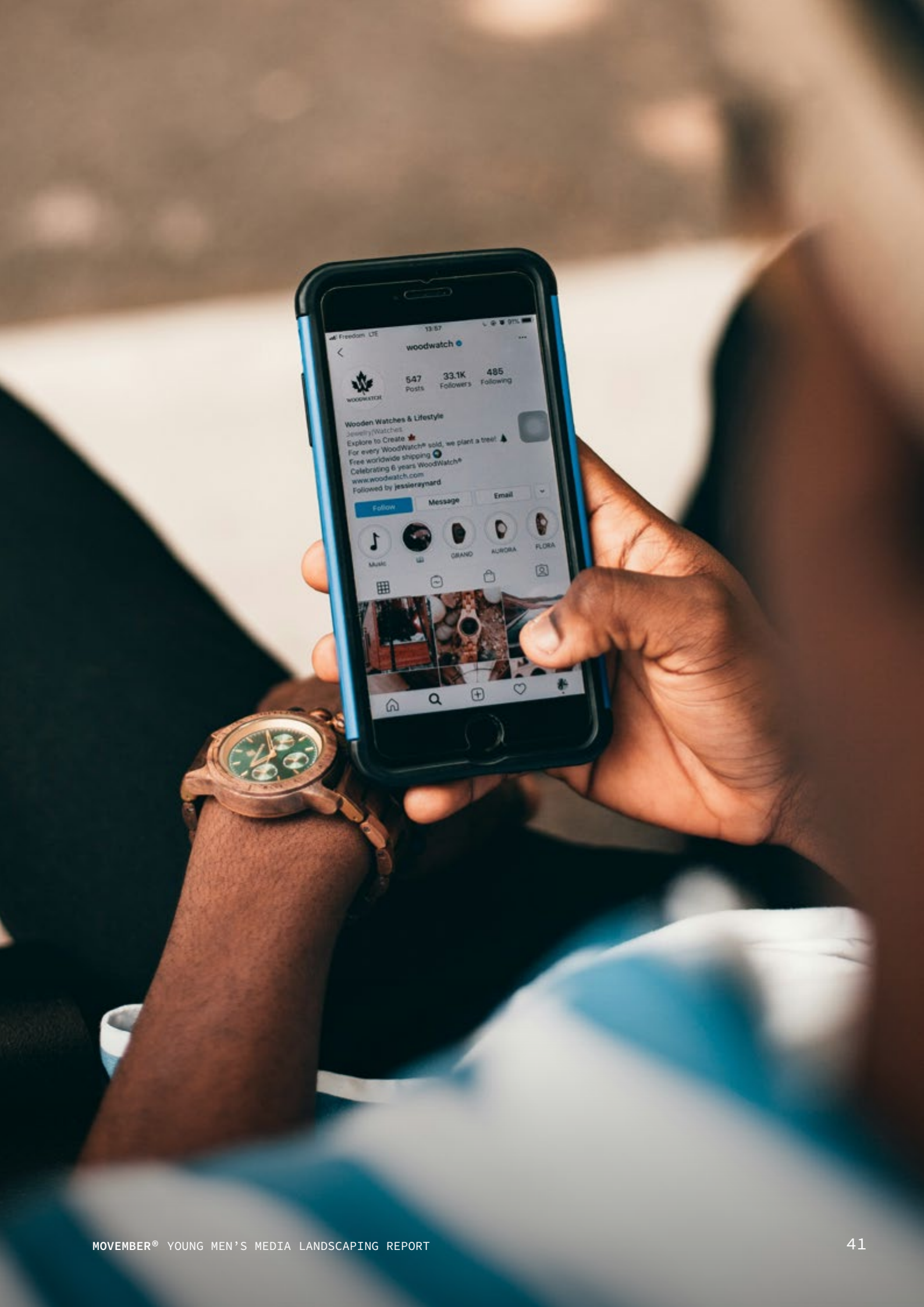
This research offers critical insights into the evolving digital worlds of young men today. The study's international scope sheds light on the similarities and differences across demographics and countries, with large, representative samples supporting a big-picture understanding of overall trends while enabling meaningful subgroup analyses.

Importantly, our research provides valuable insights into a cohort of 12 to 17 year old males that are typically harder to access. By understanding their information-seeking habits, most utilised platforms, trust in different sources, media literacy, and the role of parents in today's digital age, we can better understand and engage with young men to support their health.

Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners should use this data to guide new lines of inquiry, innovative ideas for regulation, and fresh touchpoints for communicating with young men about their digital engagement.

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