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**Christian Media in Australia:  
Who Tunes In and Who Tunes It Out**

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# Christian Media in Australia: Who Tunes In and Who Tunes It Out

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## **Christian Media in Australia: Who Tunes In & Who Tunes It Out**

Christian ministries have long used mass media to evangelize and to disciple. What media formats are used varies widely from radio stations to print to television and movies. Tone or approach can also differ with some emphasizing instruction or persuasion while others focus on entertaining audiences with a good story.

In Australia, the Christian media industry provides a variety of programming through 34 full-time radio stations, the Vision Radio Network with over 450 relay stations, and the Christian Channel available on all paid TV platforms. Conservative estimates are that these media reach 3.5 million viewers and listeners each month.<sup>1</sup>

Creating content that connects with both a Christian and mainstream audience is challenging, as what attracts one, may alienate the other. The dualistic evangelism/discipleship mindset may add to this challenge. Moreover, it's important to consider the cultural context and whether our presuppositions about our audiences and their reactions to our messages are accurate reflections of reality.

In this study, we seek to help Australia's Christian media industry understand who their consumers are and what motivates them in their media choices. Our findings, based on surveys with over 1,200 Australian teens and adults,<sup>2</sup> provide data-driven insights into why people choose Christian media, how they are affected by their media choices, and what they would like see in the future.

### **Media Consumption**

Considering all types of media, most Australians watch TV and listen to music daily. A majority reads a magazine or newspaper and plays a video game at least weekly.

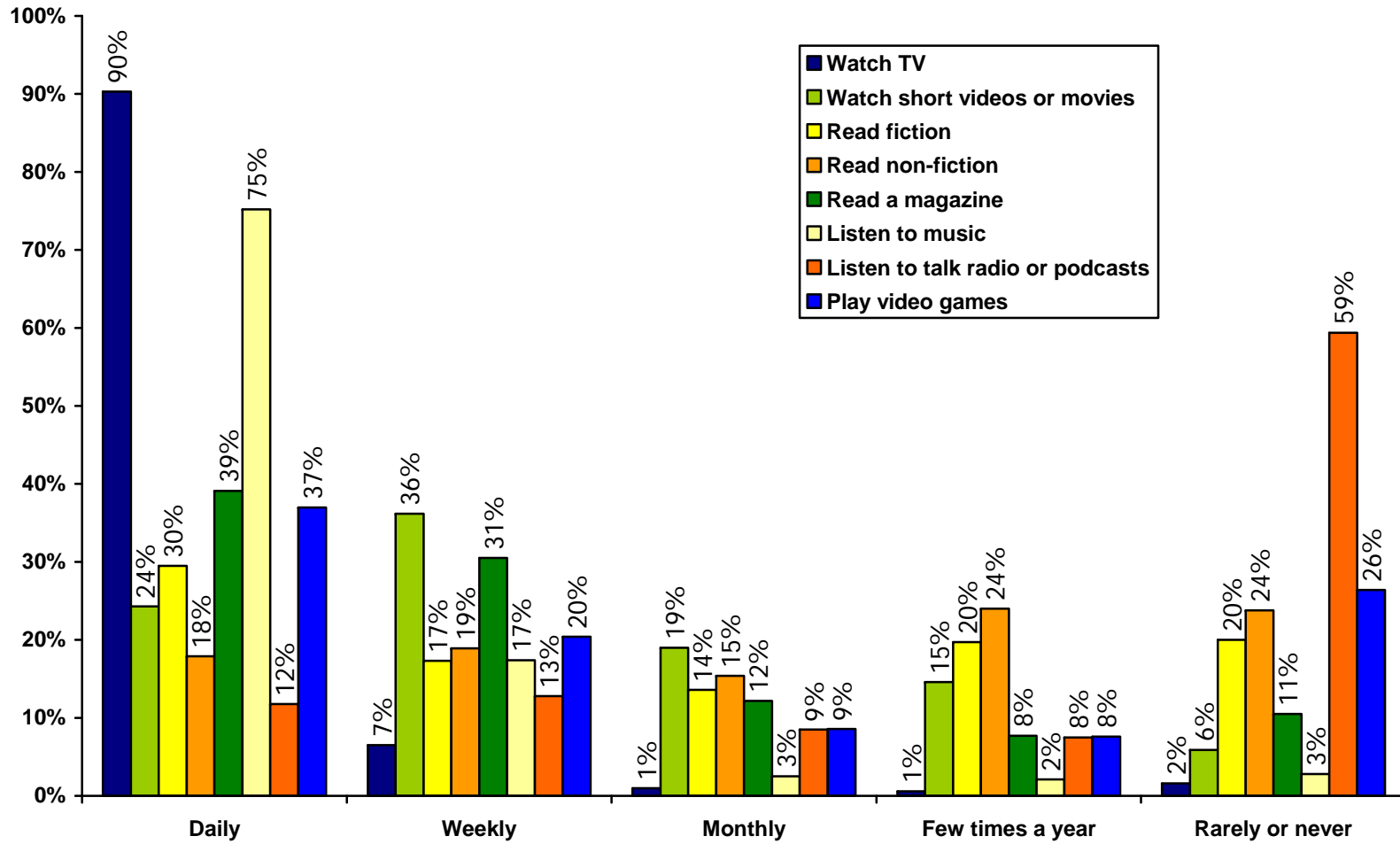
Talk radio and podcasts are the least common media types used. In fact, three out of five Australians rarely or never listen to these media types.

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Media Australia, undated, <http://christianmedia.org.au/#>

<sup>2</sup> The original sample was stratified by ages. Findings reported here are based on weighting the sample based on age and gender to be representative of the Australian population of teens and adults.

Figure 1. Frequency of Media Use, Regardless of Delivery Format



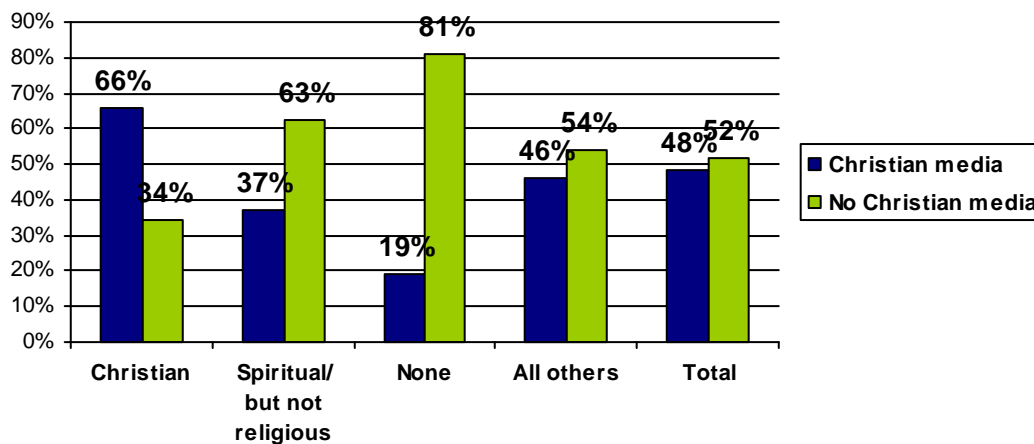
## ***One out of Two Australians Use Christian Media***

We asked survey respondents about their usage of a variety of Christian media including TV programming, short films or movies, music, and books.<sup>3</sup> Slightly less than half (48%) reported view or listening to at least some Christian media in the past.

Christian media reaches more Australians more frequently than churches do. Although census data show that most Australians identify with the Christian religion, only one-fifth attend church at least once a month (1998 Australian Community Survey).

Christian media usage varies dramatically by religious preference (see Figure 2). Two-thirds of Australian Christians use Christian media, compared 37% of those who describe themselves as “Spiritual, but not religious” and 19% of those without a preferred religion.

**Figure 2. Christian Media Use by Preferred Religion.**

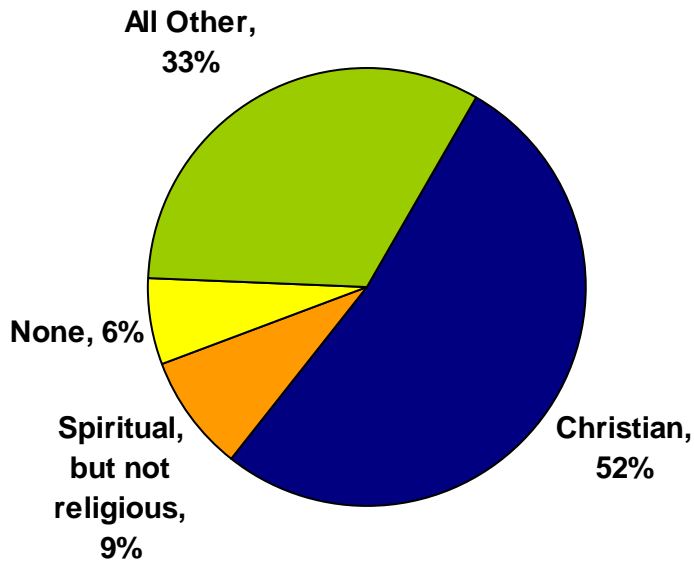


## ***Australian Christian Media Reaches a Fairly Broad Audience***

Not surprisingly, the majority of Australian Christian media consumers describe themselves as “Christian”. However, Christian media still reaches a fairly diverse audience. As shown in Figure 3, almost half (48%) of Christian media users do not describes themselves as Christian.

<sup>3</sup> Questions were asked based on type of content and across different delivery methods (e.g., a television, an e-reader, online, on a mobile device, etc).

Figure 3. Australian Christian Media Consumers.

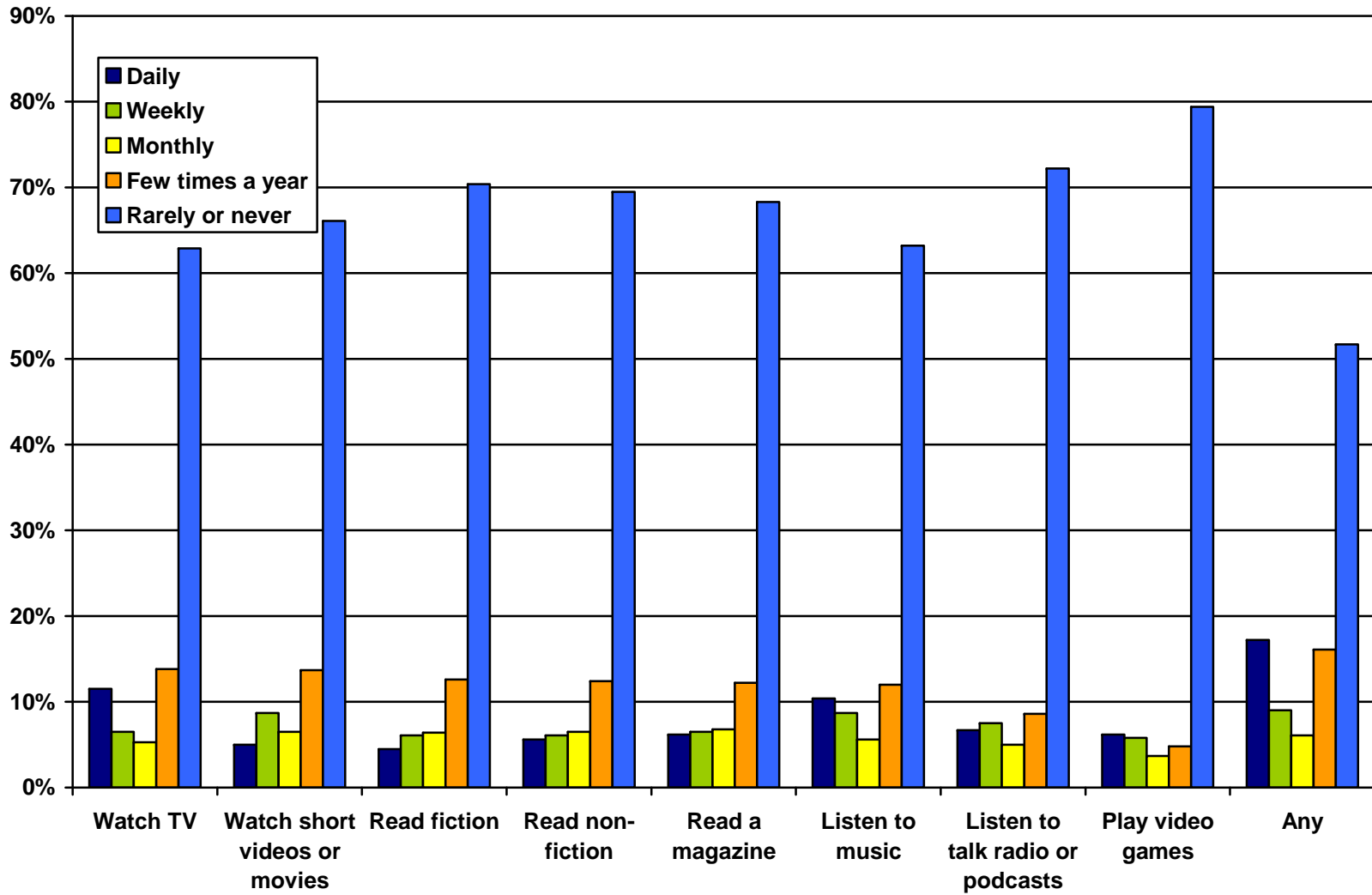


We find a similar diversity in the religious preferences of consumers across different media types. That is, whether television, short films, music or print, the Australian Christian media audience includes significant numbers of people who don't identify with the Christian faith.

***Australians Use a Variety of Christian Media.***

Figure 4 shows TV and music are the most popular forms of Christian media in Australia, each reaching about 37% of the population. Talk radio or podcasts and video games are least popular, with only one-quarter and one-fifth of Australians using these media.

Figure 4. Frequency of Christian Media Use.

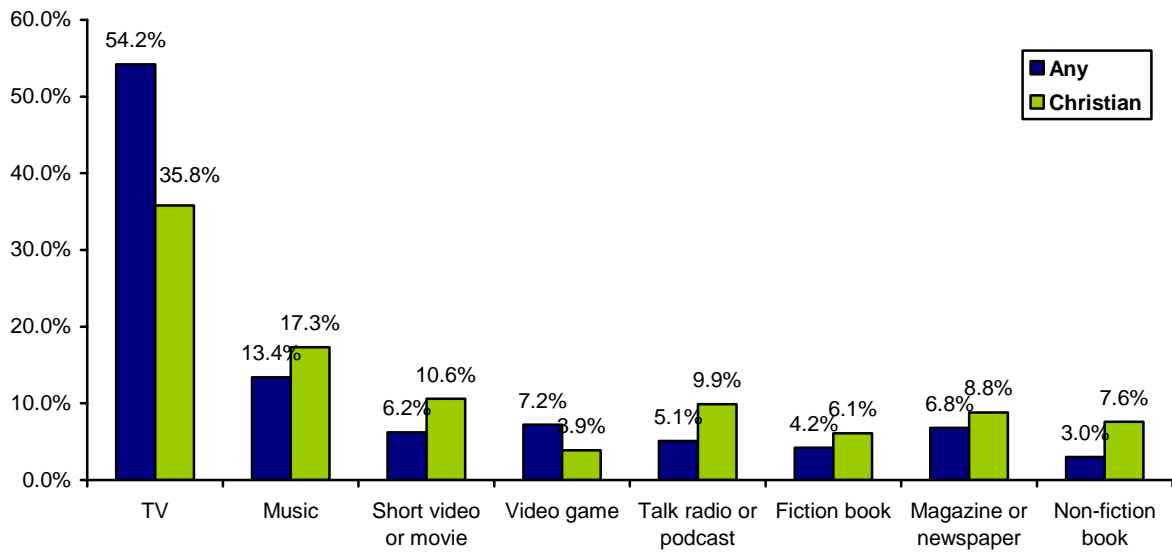


## Motivators of Media Choice

To help us understand what motivates people's media choices, we asked respondents to consider the most recent media they used. TV and music were the most common answers. Considering all media types, 54% had most recently viewed TV, while 13% had listened to music.

We see more diversity in the most recent type of Christian media. More than two-fifths of consumers recently used a form of Christian media other than TV or music.

**Figure 5. What was the most recent media you viewed or listened to?**

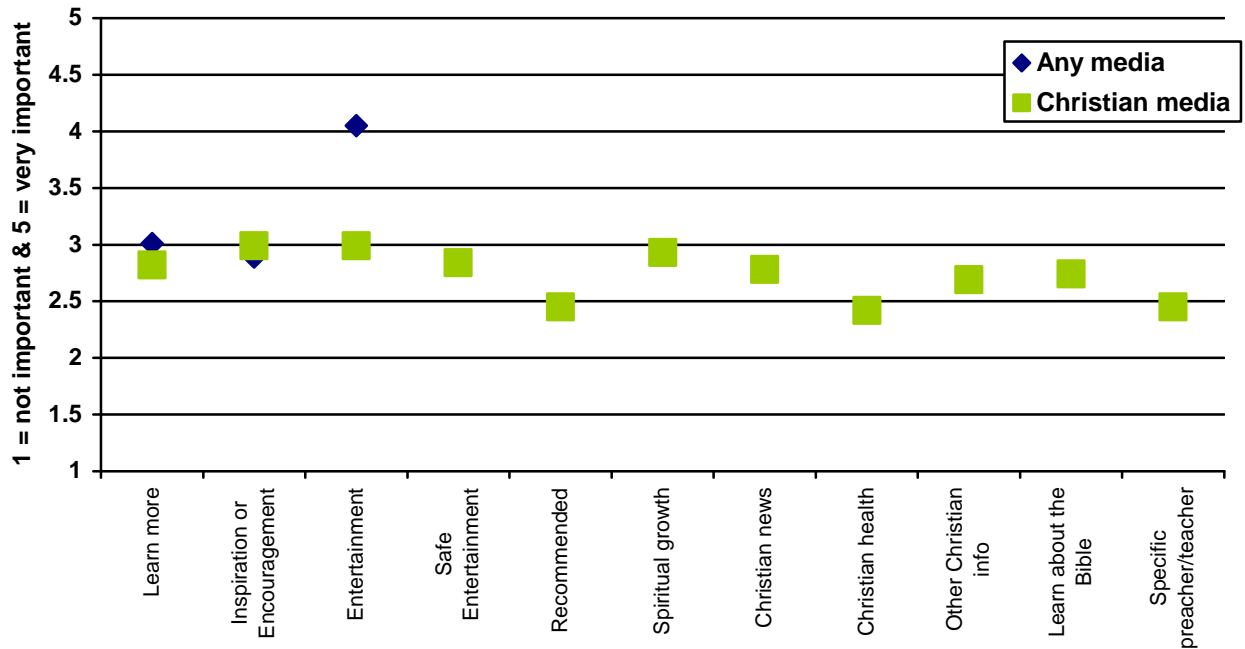




***A desire for entertainment is the strongest motivator of media choices in general. Yet Australians report a variety of reasons for choosing Christian media.***

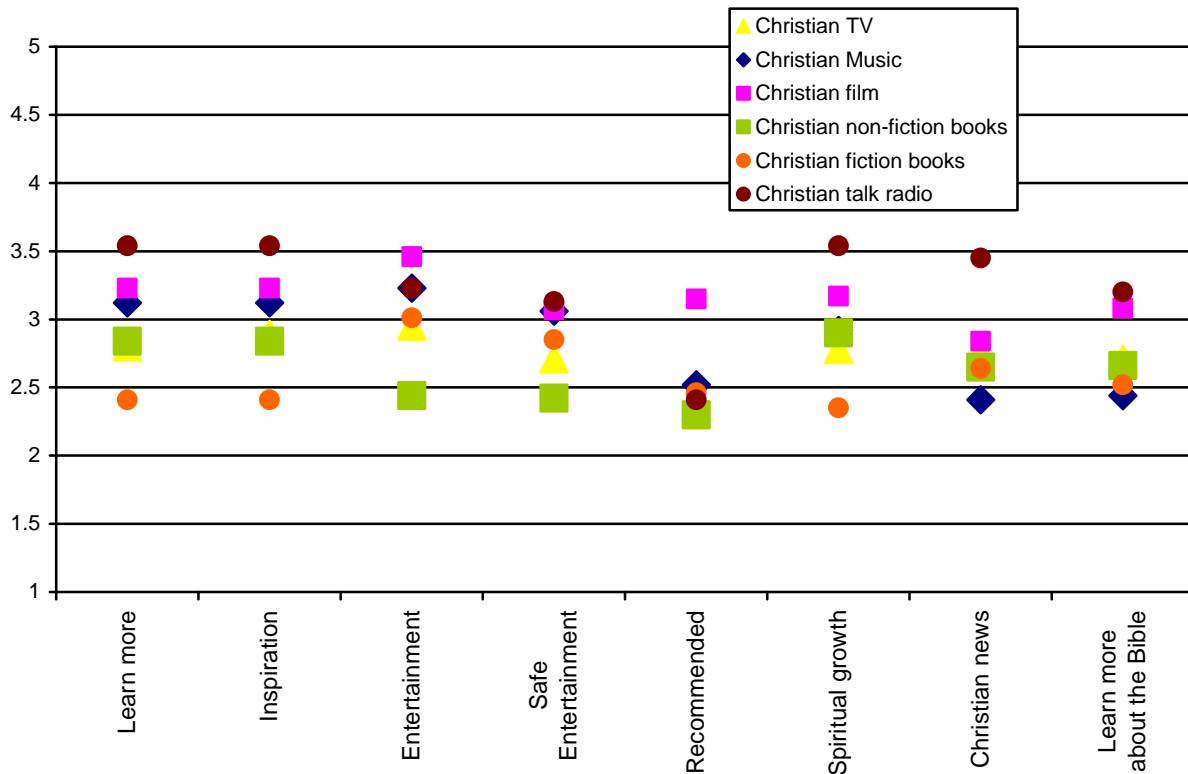
For any media, entertainment is the highest motivation, followed by learning more about a topic. For Christian media, no one motivation stands out as strongest. Entertainment, inspiration or encouragement, and spiritual growth are the top three. However, the difference between these and other motivations is negligible.

**Figure 6. How important are each of these factors in your decision to view or listen to a particular media?**



Motivations do vary depending on the type of media. For example, a desire to learn more about the Christian faith, inspiration or encouragement, and spiritual growth are stronger motivators for Christian talk radio than for fiction books. Entertainment is the highest motivation for Christian short films & movies.

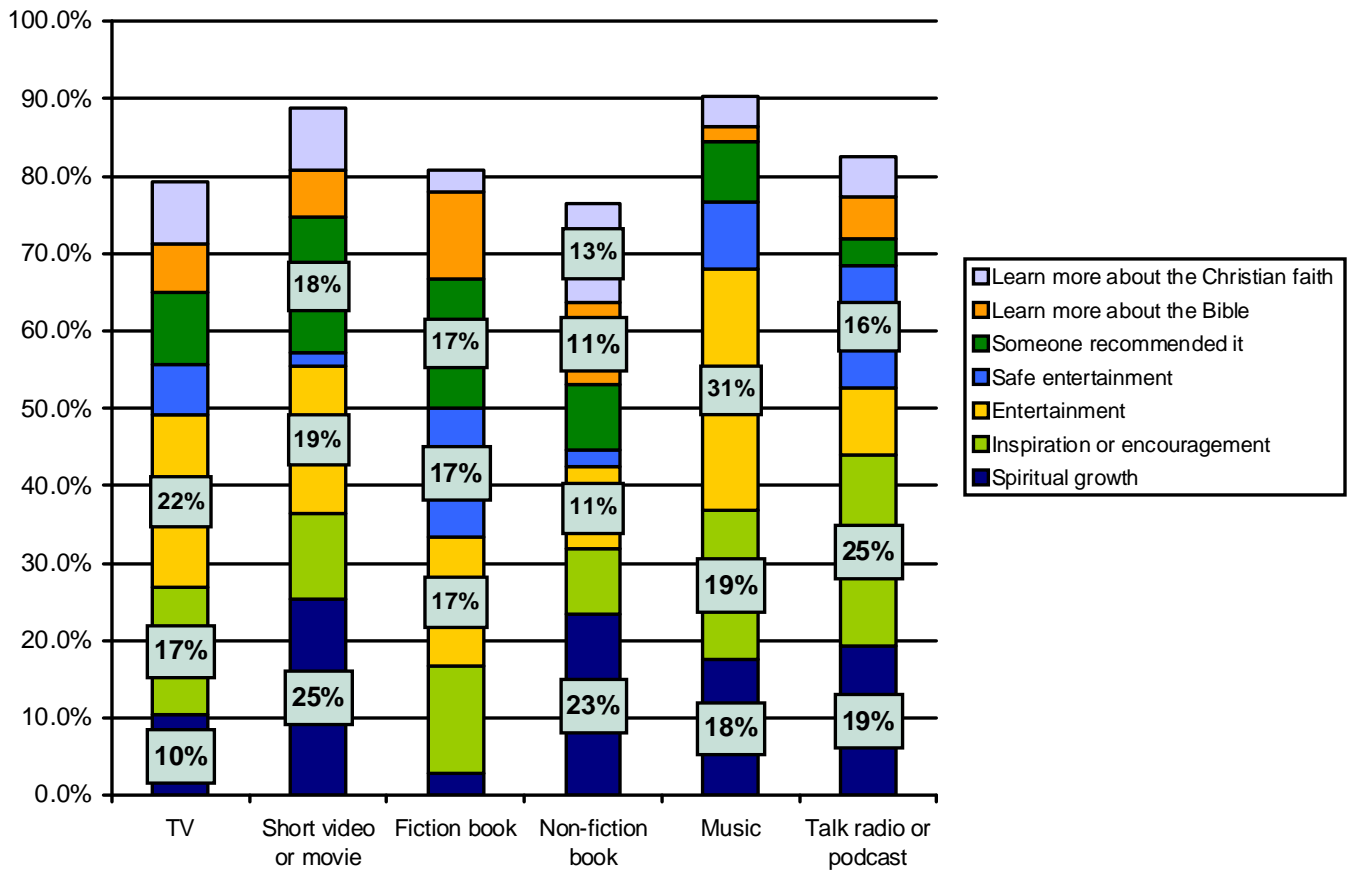
**Figure 7. Motivations by Type of Christian Media.**



***Desire for entertainment, spiritual growth and inspiration all serve as primary motivations for choosing Christian media.***

When asked about the main motivation for their last Christian media consumption, Australian teens and adults gave a variety of responses. A desire for entertainment was most common, accounting for one-fifth of responses. Spiritual growth (16.3%) and inspiration or encouragement (16.1%) ranked second and third overall.

**Figure 8. Main Motivation for Christian Media Use.**



**Media Effects**

We also asked respondents about the outcome of their media use. That is, we wanted to know if their thinking or feelings changed, or if they had taken certain actions (e.g., discussing it with someone, searching for more information).

In Figure 9, we show that the majority of people indicated some outcome from their most recent media experience. Nearly nine out of ten reported a change or action following their most recent media use.

There is a great deal of diversity in which outcomes or actions people report. For any type of media, discussing it with someone else is the most common action, accounting for

**Christian Movies Spark Spiritual Discussion?**

*Movies as diverse as Ken Russell's **The Devils**, Martin Scorsese's **The Last Temptation of Christ**, and even Monty Python's **Life of Brian** have all been branded as blasphemous and attracted sanctimonious calls for bans, yet all provided platforms for the serious and heated discussion of issues of faith in an increasingly materialistic, secular society.*

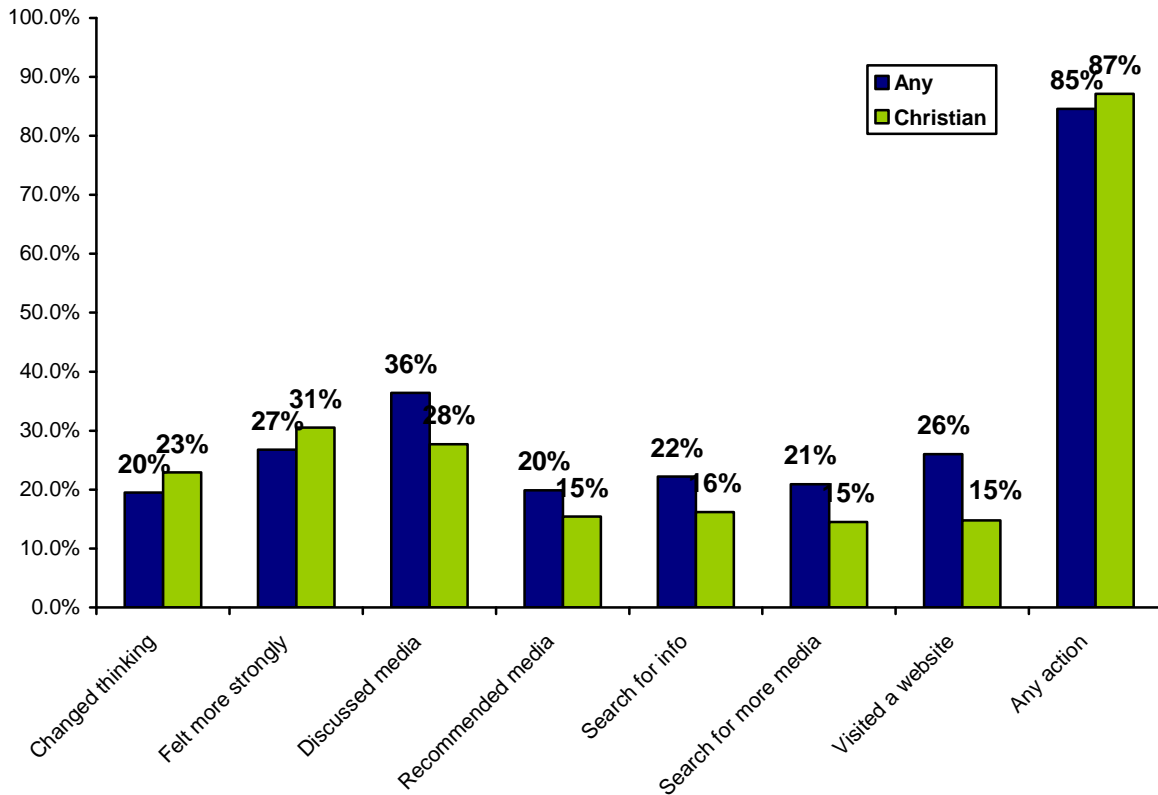
*When it comes to films, outward piety seems to exist in inverse proportion to inner spirituality.*

Mark Kermode, *The Observer*, 12/23/2006

36% of consumers.

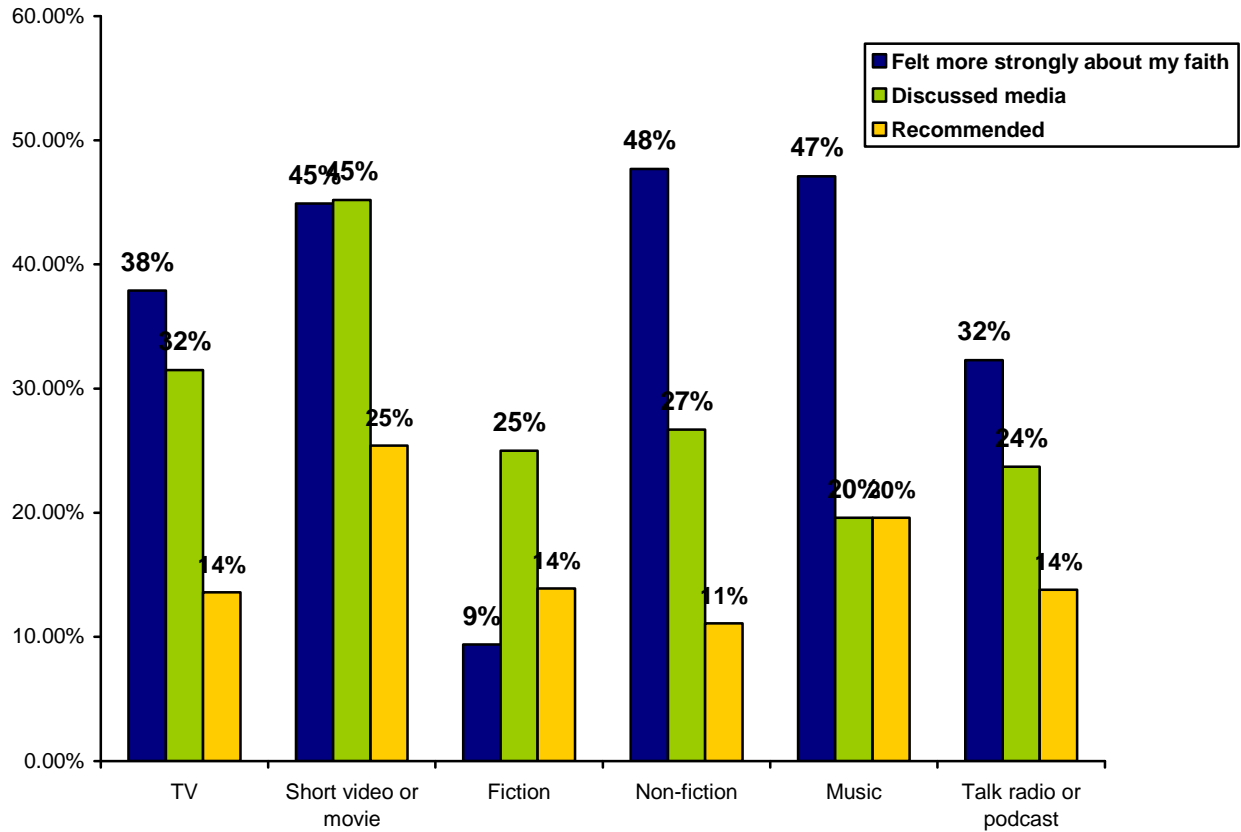
Feeling more strongly about the Christian faith is the most common outcome of Christian media, reported by 31% of consumers. More than a quarter discussed the media with someone.

**Figure 9. Outcomes or actions after viewing or listening to media.**



Outcomes or actions vary by the type of Christian media as well. "Feeling more strongly about my faith" is the most common outcome for TV, non-fiction books, and music. Viewers are most likely to discuss TV and short films or movies with others. In addition, movies and music are more likely than other media types to be recommended.

**Figure 10. Outcome of Christian Media Consumption by Media Type.**

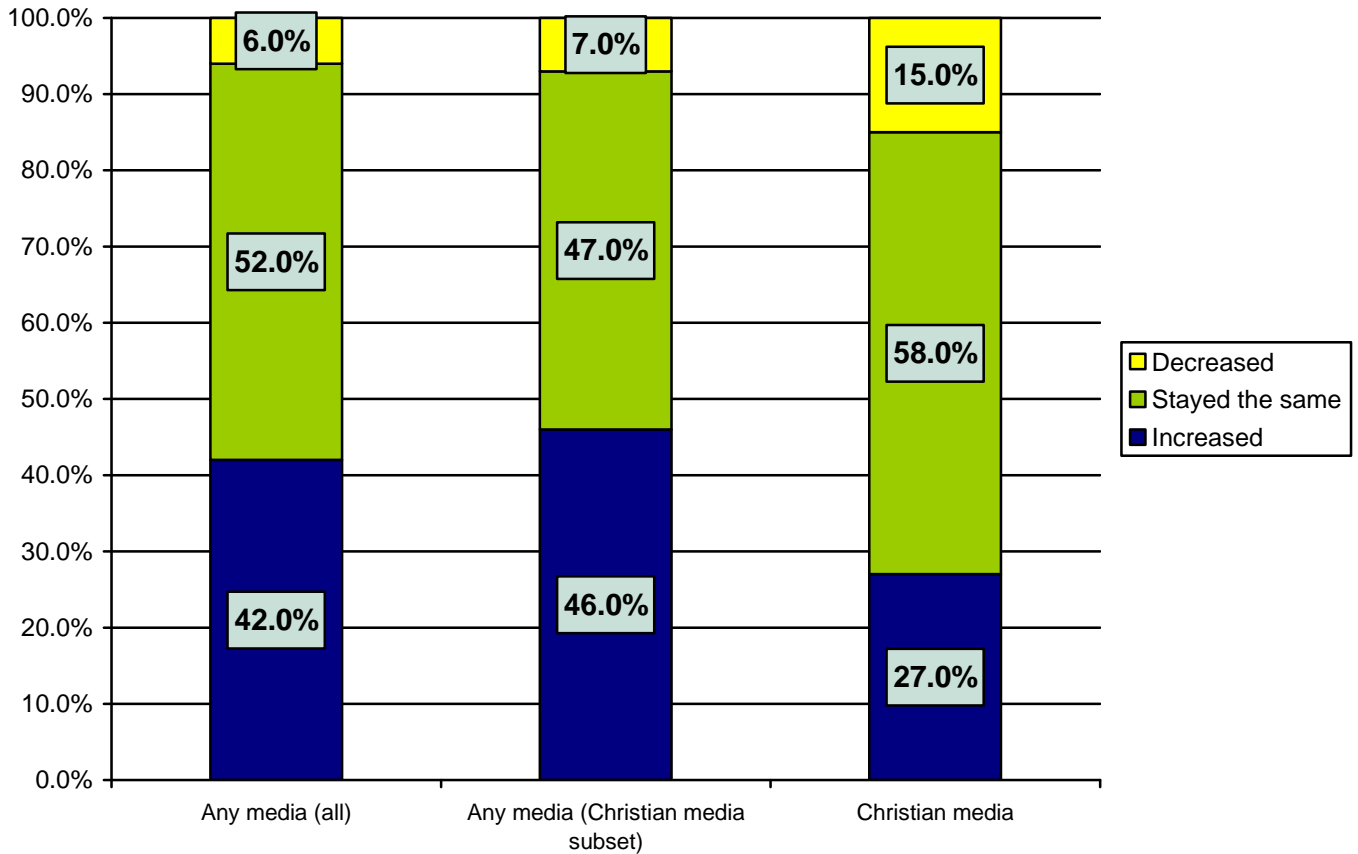


### The Future of Christian Media

Another aim of our study was to explore the possibility of gaining new Christian media consumers. We asked participants who their media use – in general and of Christian media in particular – has changed over the past five years. Two out of five Australian teens and adults say their use of media in general has increased over the past five years. Half report that this has remained about the same.

An interesting difference between general media use and Christian media use is revealed in the last two bars of Figure 11. Among Christian media users, their consumption of Christian media has shown less increase than their media use in general. Forty-six percent say their media consumption has gone up, but only 27% report an increase in their Christian media use.

**Figure 11. How has your media consumption changed over the past five years?**



***Current Christian media consumers will continue to tune in, but gaining new audiences will be difficult.***

As mentioned previously, nearly half of Australians have used Christian media. How likely are they to continue viewing or listening? Also, what opportunities are there for gaining new media users?

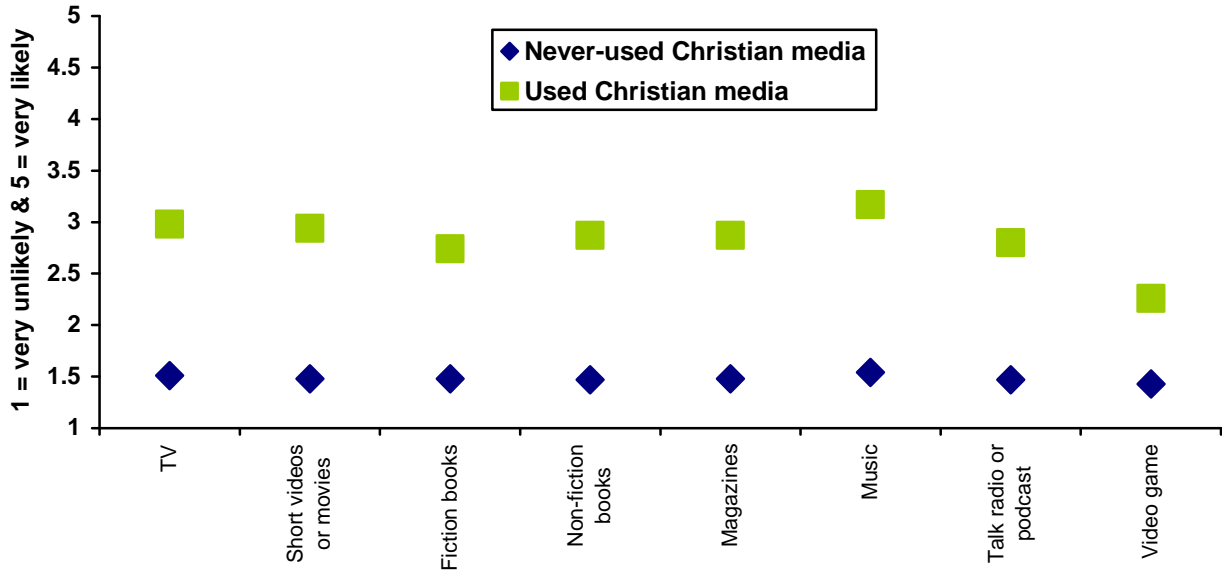
Overall, two-thirds of previous consumers are likely to use some form of Christian media again in the future. An additional 20% are unsure if they will.

Figure 12 shows the average likelihood of future use by type of media. We measure likelihood on a five-point scale with 1 being “very unlikely” and 5 indicating “very likely”. Among those who have use any Christian media, averages range from 2.3 (video games) to 3.2 (music).

The story is remarkably different among the half of Australians who have never viewed or listened to Christian media. Most (82%) who have never used Christian media in the past have also never considered viewing or listening to it. They are not likely to in the future. Two out of three non-users said they are “very unlikely” to use any Christian media in the future. Their

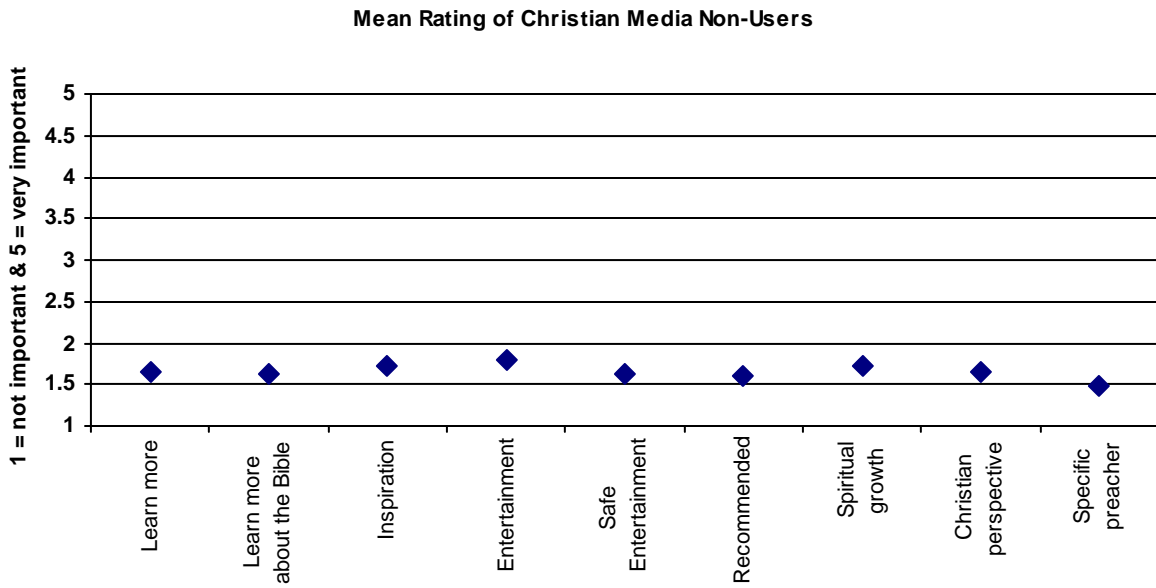
average likelihood ratings are subsequently low, ranging from 1.43 (video games) to 1.54 (music).

Figure 12. Likelihood of Using Christian Media in the Future.



When asked about different factors that might motivate them to view or listen to Christian media, non-users rated all equally low. In other words, it doesn't matter to them if the media offered inspiration, encouragement, or entertainment or even if someone recommended it, because they are profoundly not interested.

Figure 13. How important would these factors be in your decision to view Christian media?



As mentioned previously, Australians who are not currently using Christian media show no interest in doing so in the future. Most responses to an open-ended question about what they would like to see in Christian media, as illustrated in Figure 14, indicated the same theme: Nothing. As one respondent shared:

*"Watching Christian media sounds about as fun as watching paint dry. Christian's opinions are wild, dangerous and close minded. The idea of Christian media scares me."*

Figure 14. What Australians Want From Christian Media.





***To engage the Australian culture, Christian media should focus on modern and entertaining depictions of real life that present the Christian point of view in a non-judgmental way.***

However, other responses provide more insights into how Christian media producers may be able to engage them. Several themes emerge from the data. Australians are interested in Christian media that is more open, real, and doesn't pressure others to convert. Respondents showed the most interest in media that explores how Christians view different real world issues in the context of alternate views.

*more open and honest discussions about issues in society*

*a more balanced view on many topics*

*I would like to see some different views and opinions because as of now all of the christian media has the same idea.*

Similarly, some talked about having more modern themes and content that is more entertaining. For example:

*"Less evangelical and more modern themes. The world has come a long way but religion hasn't"*

Others talked of having more movies either about the Bible or history, youth-focused music and television shows, and comedy.

## **Conclusions**

In this study, we've explored how Australians use and perceive Christian media. The good news is that about half of Australian teens and adults consume at least some form of Christian media. From the perspective of sharing the Gospel, Australian Christian media does reach a fairly diverse audience, with more than 40% not identifying with the Christian faith.

A desire for entertainment is a strong motivator of people's media choices, be they mainstream or Christian-focused. Australians also look to Christian media for spiritual growth, inspiration, and encouragement. These motivations, however, are not as prominent among Australian Christian media consumers as in the United States.

Our findings indicate that, for the most part, Christian media is already reaching as broad an audience in Australia as it can in the current format. That is, those who are not tuned into Christian media already have no desire to do so. That may change, they tell us, if Christian media portrays real life in a modern and entertaining way that acknowledges other points of view.