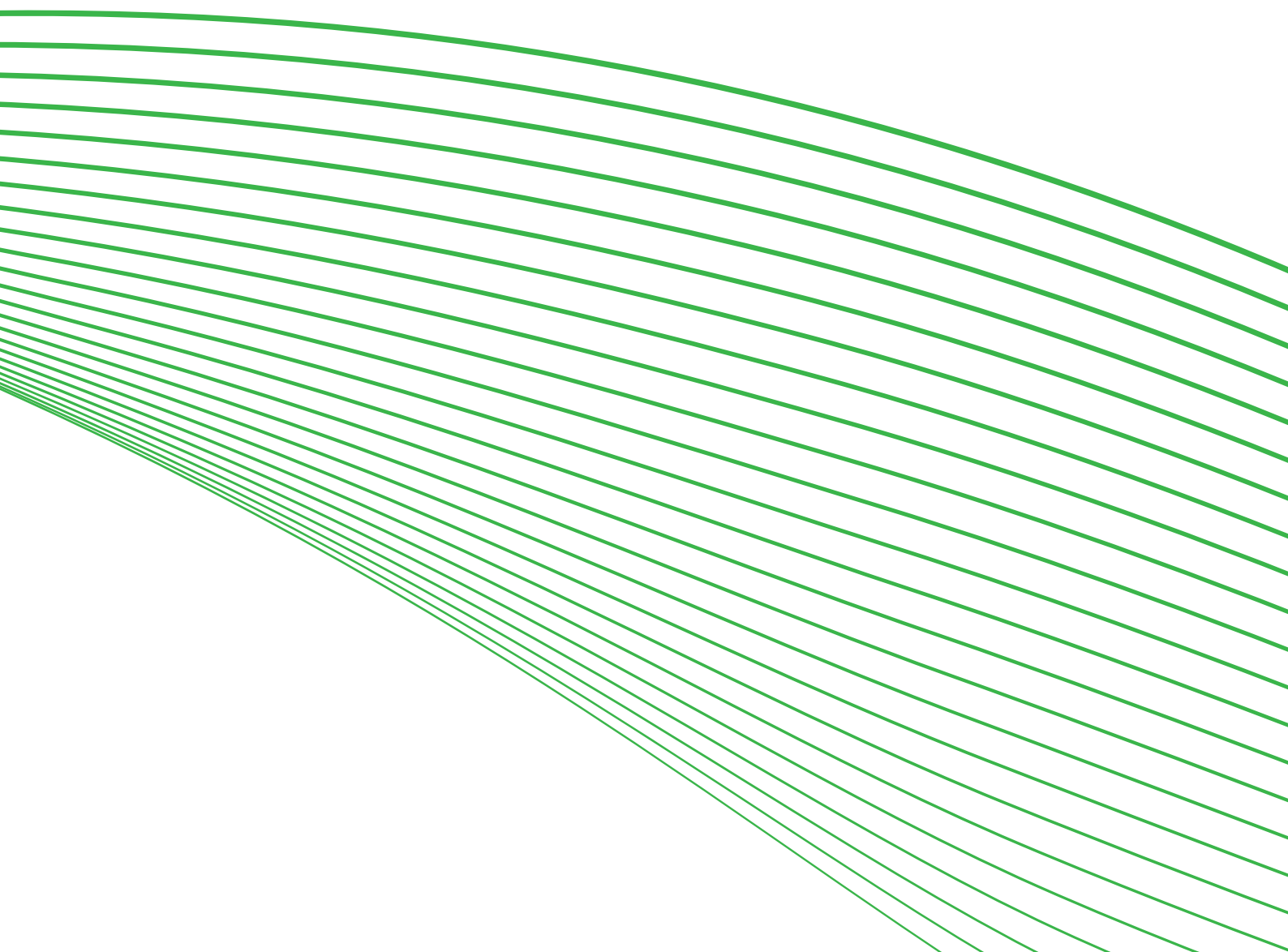


researchacma

Unsolicited telemarketing calls and spam

Consumer experiences

NOVEMBER 2013



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1. Overview

Background

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (the ACMA) is responsible for regulating broadcasting, the internet, radiocommunications and telecommunications in Australia. Part of this responsibility is oversight of the *Do Not Call Register Act 2006*, the *Telemarketing and Research Calls Industry Standard 2007*, the *Fax Marketing Industry Standard 2011* and the *Spam Act 2003*, which set out the rules for unsolicited communications—telemarketing calls, fax marketing calls and commercial electronic messages (spam).

Under the legislation, consumers are able to complain and report such unsolicited communications to the ACMA, which has the power to investigate and take enforcement action in response to breaches of the legislation.

In 2012–13, the ACMA received over 400,000 direct complaints and reports from members of the public about unsolicited communications, including:

- > 412,743 spam complaints, reports and enquiries
- > 19,677 telemarketing complaints.

In response, the ACMA contacted 8,162 businesses identified as potentially in breach of obligations set out in the *Do Not Call Register Act*, *Spam Act* or related industry standards.

Given this high number of complaints, the ACMA aims to better understand consumer experiences of unsolicited communications, so it can effectively target and prioritise its compliance and enforcement activities.

This research

In the second half of 2012, the ACMA commissioned Roy Morgan Research to conduct quantitative and qualitative research into consumer experiences with unsolicited telemarketing calls and spam (via email and SMS).

Questions about spam-like messages received via online social media and messaging services were also included. While unsolicited online communications are not necessarily subject to regulation, the ACMA wanted to improve its understanding of the impact on consumers and whether they find such communications a problem.

A total of 1,500 computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) were conducted in mid-July 2012 with Australian residents aged 18 years and older. This comprised 1,207 household respondents with fixed-line phones and 293 mobile-only phone users. The sample was designed to ensure that survey coverage was representative of the Australian population aged 18 years or older in terms of age, gender, geographic characteristics and phone use (fixed-line and mobile). Significance testing at the 95 per cent confidence level has been applied to findings from the survey research, with the methodology permitting final survey results to be generalised to the Australian population aged 18 and older.

In addition to the CATI research, Roy Morgan Research also conducted four qualitative focus groups to provide depth and richness to the national survey results. Two groups were conducted in Melbourne and two on the Sunshine Coast, with eight to 10 participants in each group. Each group was mixed gender, with two groups comprising people aged 18–34 years and two groups with people aged 35 years and over. At least three participants in each group had been exposed to some form of

unsolicited electronic communications in the last six months (see Appendix A for further details on the survey design and research methodology).

In 2009, the ACMA commissioned a telephone survey of 1,625 respondents from Newspoll. That survey covered community attitudes to unsolicited telemarketing calls, electronic communications and community awareness. Some questions from the 2009 survey were repeated in the current research. Where relevant, findings from 2009 have been compared against the 2012 survey findings.

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Unsolicited telemarketing and spam—Consumer experiences is published under the researchacma program, which identifies communications and media matters of continuing significance to society, markets and government, and contributes to the ACMA's legislative obligations to reflect community standards in the delivery of media and communications services.

researchacma has five broad areas of interest:

- > market developments
- > media content and culture
- > digital society
- > safeguards
- > regulatory practice and design.

All ACMA research publications are available on the [ACMA website](#).

Main findings

The survey found that the majority of Australian adults received one or more unsolicited telemarketing calls or spam emails in the previous month. Specifically:

- > 40 per cent received unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses in the previous month (51 per cent received such calls in the previous six months)
- > 61 per cent received spam email in the previous month (73 per cent of personal email users)
- > 24 per cent received SMS spam in the previous month (27 per cent of personal mobile phone users)
- > 15 per cent received online spam via social media services in the previous six months (23 per cent of online social media users).

The survey also reveals that the majority of people who received such unsolicited communications perceived them as a problem to some degree. And, the more frequent they were, the greater the problem. For example, of those who received unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses in the previous six months, 18 per cent received them daily (every day or more often)—and, of this group, 84 per cent regarded them as often or always a problem. Of the 21 per cent who received them monthly (once a month or more often but not every week), 52 per cent said they were often or always a problem. A similar pattern applied to spam email and SMS.

The frequency that people received unsolicited communications over the period of one month varied for each type of communication received:

- > unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses—23 per cent of the people who received these calls received them daily (every day or more often), 42 per cent weekly (at least once a week or more often, but not every day) and 35 per cent monthly (once a month or more often, but less than once a week)

- > spam email messages were received more frequently—33 per cent received them daily (seven or more messages a week), 52 per cent weekly (1–6 messages a week) and 11 per cent monthly (at least once a month but none in a typical week)
- > SMS spam messages were received less frequently—two per cent received them daily (30 or more messages a month), 18 per cent weekly (four to 29 messages a month) and 66 per cent monthly (one to three messages a month).

Despite fewer respondents receiving unsolicited telemarketing calls, and their lower frequency than spam emails, telemarketing calls were generally perceived as more of a problem—regarded as often or always a problem by 56 per cent of recipients.

Further, while more people received spam emails than spam SMS or online spam, and spam emails were received more often than spam SMS, each type of spam was reported as often or always a problem by approximately a third of recipients. Thirty-six per cent found spam emails often or always a problem compared to 33 per cent for spam SMS and 32 per cent for online spam. This suggests that spam SMS and online spam might be more of a problem than email spam. Focus group participants supported this by indicating that spam emails were less intrusive than telemarketing calls or SMS spam.

Telemarketing calls were primarily regarded as a problem because they were a nuisance or annoying (38 per cent of people who identified them as a problem) and because they were received at inappropriate times (36 per cent) including at dinner time (17 per cent). Fewer people regarded spam email and SMS messages as a nuisance or annoying (17 per cent for spam email and 22 per cent for spam SMS). Unique problems associated with spam emails included the clutter produced in inboxes that was time-consuming to delete (17 per cent) and the prospect of their computer being infected with a virus if an email was opened (seven per cent). The unique problems associated with spam SMS were recipients not wanting or liking them (12 per cent) and concerns about privacy or security of personal information (10 per cent).

More than half of those who received telemarketing calls hung up on the caller either as soon as they realised who was calling (33 per cent) or at some point later in the call (23 per cent). The majority of people who received spam emails deleted them without opening (87 per cent), and most who received spam SMS deleted them after opening (67 per cent).

The survey also looked at the types of personal communications devices and services adult Australians use as a whole, by age, the relationship to the type and frequency of calls and messages, and perceptions about the unsolicited communications received. The survey indicated that age was more of a factor for receiving telemarketing calls than for spam. This was primarily due to the higher number of older Australians with fixed-line phones and the higher frequency of telemarketing calls being made to these phones.

2. Consumer use of personal electronic communications

Consumers receive unsolicited telemarketing calls and spam via a number of communications devices. Telemarketing calls can be received on fixed-line and mobile phones; spam SMS on mobile phones; and spam email on any internet-enabled device including smart phones, computers, laptops and tablets. A range of email services are also available, including on webmail, ISP or work email accounts.

The type of communications devices and services consumers use can influence the type and number of unsolicited communications they receive. Chapter 2 looks at the use of these devices and services as a prelude to subsequent chapters that examine the volume of unsolicited telemarketing calls and spam received.

Table 2.1 summarises the use of communication devices by adult Australians, by location and age. Overall, these results are consistent with other data—mobile phones are the most popular personal communication devices used in Australia, with nearly 9 in 10 Australians owning one. The use of mobile phones has continued to increase in recent years and has overtaken the proportion of Australians with fixed-line home phones (83 per cent), which has been declining.

Also increasing is the proportion of adult Australians who use the internet (86 per cent) and have a personal email address (83 per cent). More than three-quarters (76 per cent) use the internet for financial transactions (including shopping), while 66 per cent use it for social media and networking.

The research also suggests that more Australians living in metropolitan areas use personal communications devices and services than those living in non-metropolitan areas. However, these differences (see Table 2.1) are not statistically significant.

Age differences significantly affect how particular communications devices and services are used, which is discussed further below.

Table 2.1 Use of personal electronic communications by Australians aged 18 years and over, July 2012

Personal communications devices and online activities	Total	Location		Age in years				
		Metro	Non-metro	18–24	25–34	35–49	50–64	65+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Have mobile phone	89	91	85	96	95	92	89	71
Have fixed-line phone at home	83	83	83	71	67	85	91	97
Have email address	83	86	79	95	94	87	81	60
Have internet-enabled home computer or laptop	81	83	77	89	90	90	79	56
Use the internet	86	88	82	99	96	92	82	60
<i>Make online financial transactions</i>	76	79	71	91	91	85	66	43
<i>Use social media (includes social networking)</i>	66	68	62	96	88	72	52	29

Base: All adult respondents (n=1,500); living in metro areas (n=890), living in non-metro areas (n=610); aged 18–24 (n=149), 25–34 (n=283), 35–49 (n=396), 50–64 (n=378), 65+ (n=294).

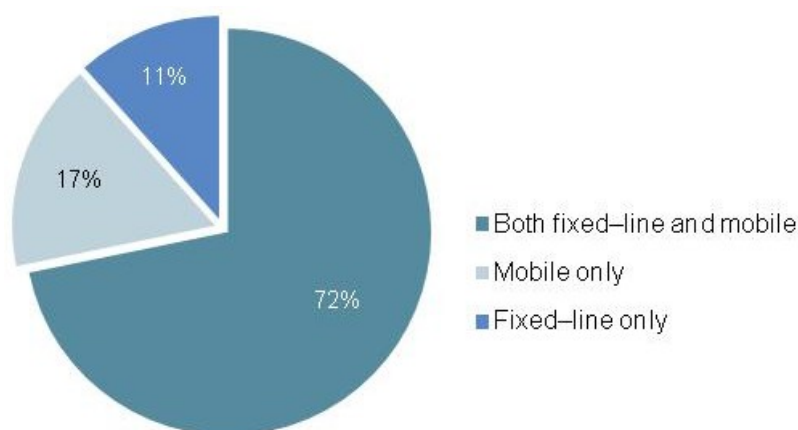
Fixed-line and mobile phones

At July 2012, 97 per cent of adult Australians aged 65 years and over had a fixed-line home phone, compared to 71 per cent of those aged 18–24. It was almost exactly the reverse for mobile phones—owned by 96 per cent of the 18–24 age group compared to 71 per cent of those aged 65 years and over (see Table 2.1).

Since 2009, mobile phone ownership has remained the same for people aged 18–24 and has increased a small degree for most other age groups, particularly those 65 years and over (from 66 per cent in 2009 to 71 per cent in 2012).

As shown above, 89 per cent of adult Australians reported having a mobile phone and 83 per cent a fixed-line home phone. Figure 2.1 shows another breakdown of phone use.

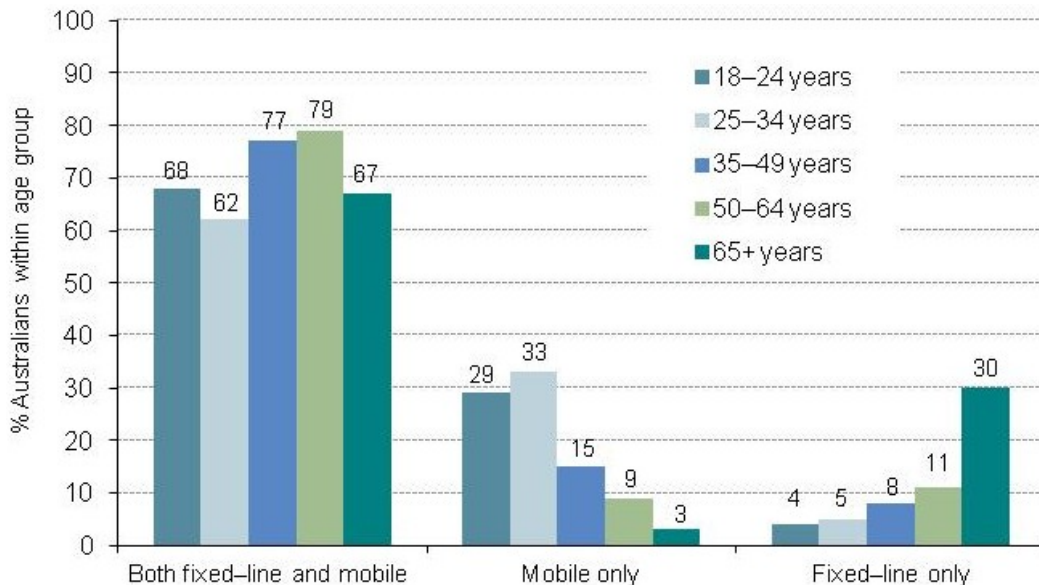
Figure 2.1 Fixed-line phones at home and personal mobile phones



Base: All adult respondents (n=1,500).

The relationship between age and type of phone likely to be used was further highlighted by those people who reported only having either a fixed-line home or mobile phone. Of those with a fixed-line phone only, 30 per cent were aged 65 years and over compared to four per cent in the 18–24 group. Conversely, for those who only had a mobile phone, 29 per cent were 18–24 while three per cent were 65 or over.

Figure 2.2 Type of phone, by age



Base: Respondents aged 18–24 (n=149), 25–34 (n=283), 35–49 (n=396), 50–64 (n=378), 65+ (n=294).

Focus group comments—Type of phone used

Many participants in the focus groups said the type of telephone service they used depends on what they need it for, including being able to make cheaper phone calls on fixed-line or mobile phones and remaining contactable for fixed-line-only users. Some kept a fixed-line home phone because it formed part of a package deal that was more cost-effective when bundled with other services.

I always try and make my calls on the landline and mainly SMS on mobile. (aged 35+)

If I have to contact [someone, I] let them ring me, not me ring them and basically [I use] the home phone, just local calls on the home phone (aged 35+)

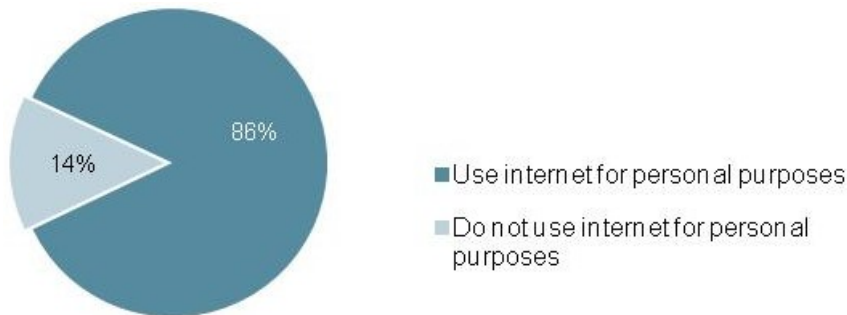
It [fixed-line home phone] is becoming redundant and I would get rid of it, except I've got a package deal with your internet that comes [as] an all-inclusive thing, so it's not that expensive to have the landline and I've got elderly parents who would die if they had to call a mobile phone, so that's one of the main reasons I keep the landline. (aged 35+)

Internet

Similar to mobile phone use, use of the internet gradually decreases with age. Nearly all (99 per cent) people aged 18–24 used the internet, decreasing to 60 per cent of those aged 65 years and over (see Table 2.1).

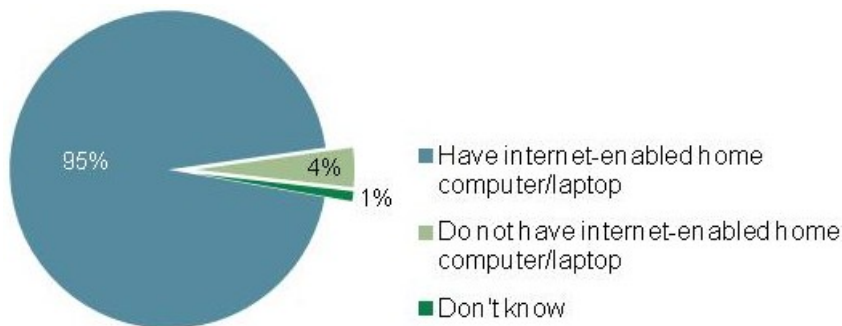
Figure 2.3 shows that 86 per cent of Australian adults reported using the internet for personal purposes. Of these, 95 per cent had their own internet-enabled home computer or laptop (81 per cent of Australian adults).

Figure 2.3a Australians using the internet for personal purposes



Base: All adult respondents (n=1,500).

Figure 2.4b Proportion with an internet-enabled home computer or laptop



Base: Respondents who used the internet for personal purposes (n=1,257).

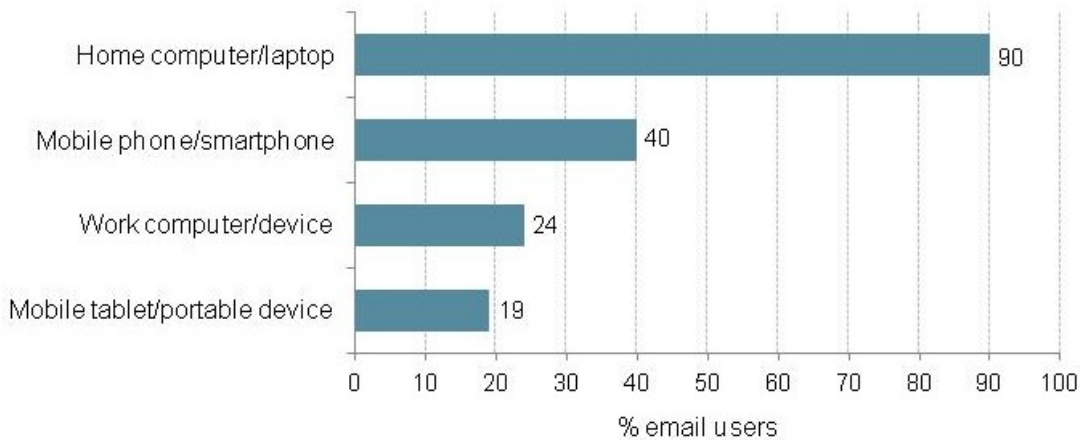
Email

Table 2.1 shows that 83 per cent of Australian adults have an email address they use for personal purposes—an increase of nine per cent since 2009. Like mobile phone ownership and internet use, fewer older adults have a personal email address—60 per cent of those aged 65 years and older, compared to 95 per cent of 18–24s and 94 per cent of 25–34s.

The high level of email use among young adults aged 18–24 is similar to the 2009 results (92 per cent). However, considerably more people aged 65 years and over now have an email address—60 per cent compared to 41 per cent in 2009, indicating a closing age gap for email use.

Figure 2.4 shows the breakdown of devices used to read personal emails.

Figure 2.4 Devices typically used to read personal emails



Base: Respondents with a personal email address (n=1,219).

Email services

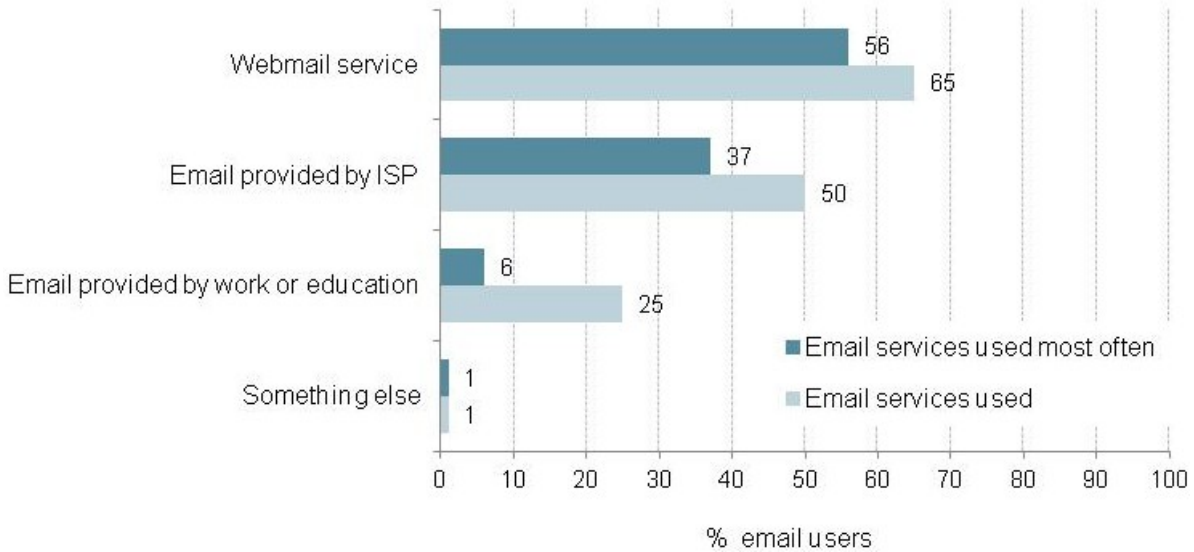
Twenty-nine per cent of Australian adults with a personal email address reported using more than one type of email service to access their emails, while the remaining 71 per cent used only one type. The types of email services reported in the survey are:

- > webmail services such as Hotmail, Yahoo or Gmail
- > emails provided by an internet service provider (ISP) such as Telstra or Optus
- > emails provided by place of work or education.

Overall, 65 per cent of personal email users used a webmail service; half an email account provided by their ISP and a quarter an account from their place of work or education (see Figure 2.5).

Webmail services were also used most often—by 56 per cent of email users, up from 37 per cent in 2009. Email services provided by ISPs were the next most popular, although their use has declined from 48 per cent in 2009 to 37 per cent. Only a relatively small number of respondents used email services provided by their employer or place of education for personal emails, and this proportion also declined from 13 per cent in 2009 to six per cent.

Figure 2.5 Types of email services used and types used most often

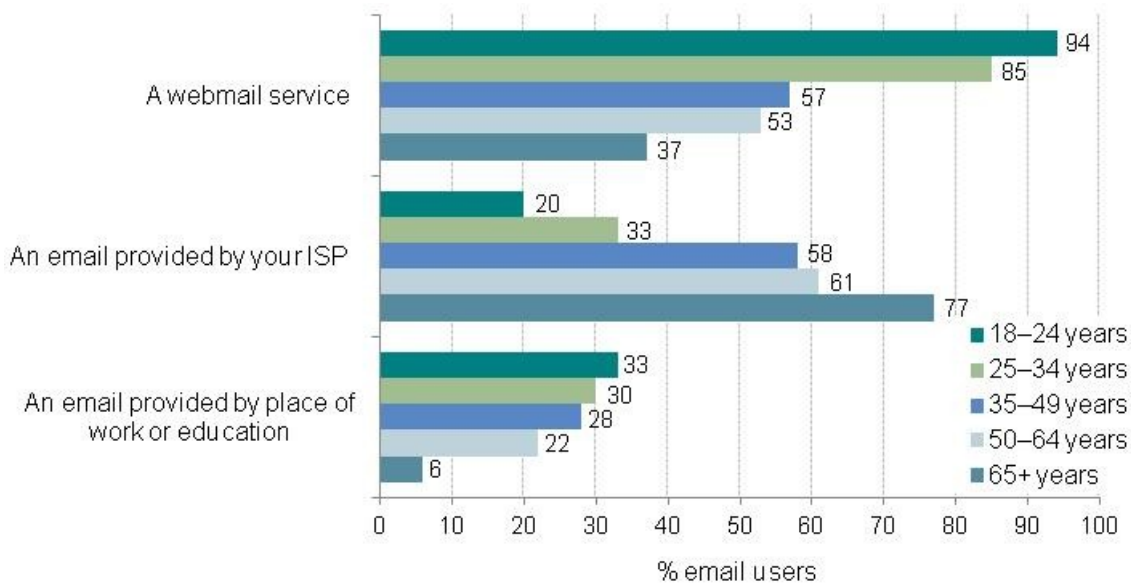


Base: Respondents with a personal email address (n=1,219).

Figure 2.6 shows that the email service types used varied substantially by age. Webmail services were used mainly by young adults aged 18–24 (94 per cent) and 25–34 (85 per cent), whereas ISP-provided email accounts were mainly used by people aged 65 and over (77 per cent).

The use of webmail services by young adults has increased since 2009, when 77 per cent of the 18–24 group and 46 per cent of the 25–34 group reported their use. The level of use of ISP-provided email services by people aged 65 years and over has remained constant (78 per cent in 2009). Use of ISP-provided email services declined between 2009 and 2012 for those aged 35–49 (76 to 58 per cent) and 50–64 (75 per cent to 61 per cent).

Figure 2.6 Types of email services used, by age

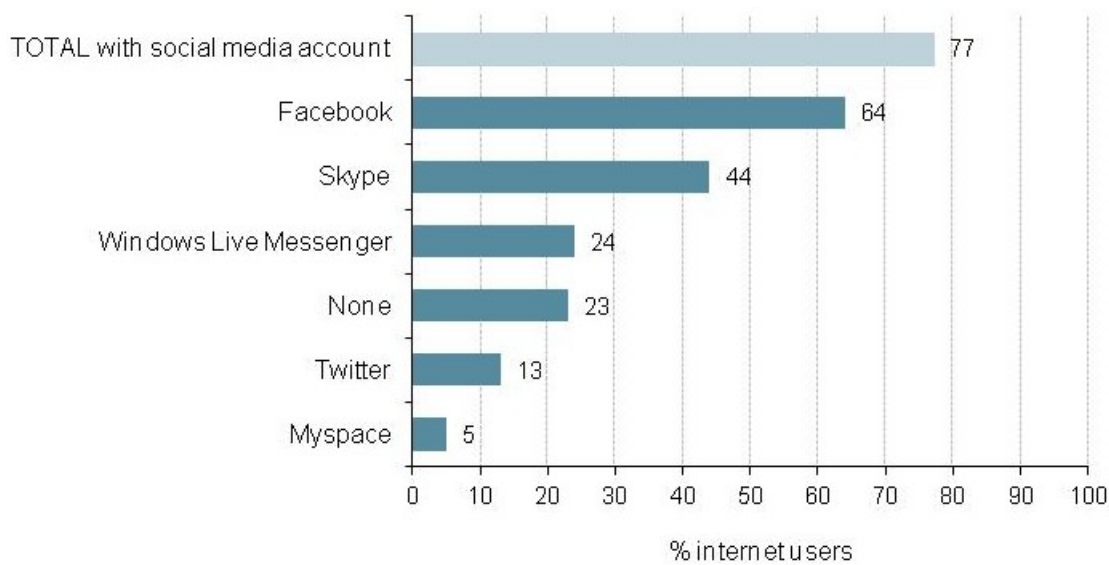


Base: Respondents with a personal email address aged 18–24 (n=142), 25–34 (n=263), 35–49 (n=343), 50–64 (n=298), 65+ (n=173).

Online social media and messaging services

Seventy-seven per cent of internet users (66 per cent of Australian adults) had a personal account with an online social media or messaging service. The most commonly identified individual social media services were Facebook (64 per cent of internet users) and Skype (44 per cent). Nearly a quarter of internet users had Windows Live Messenger (24 per cent) and 13 per cent a Twitter account (Figure 2.7)

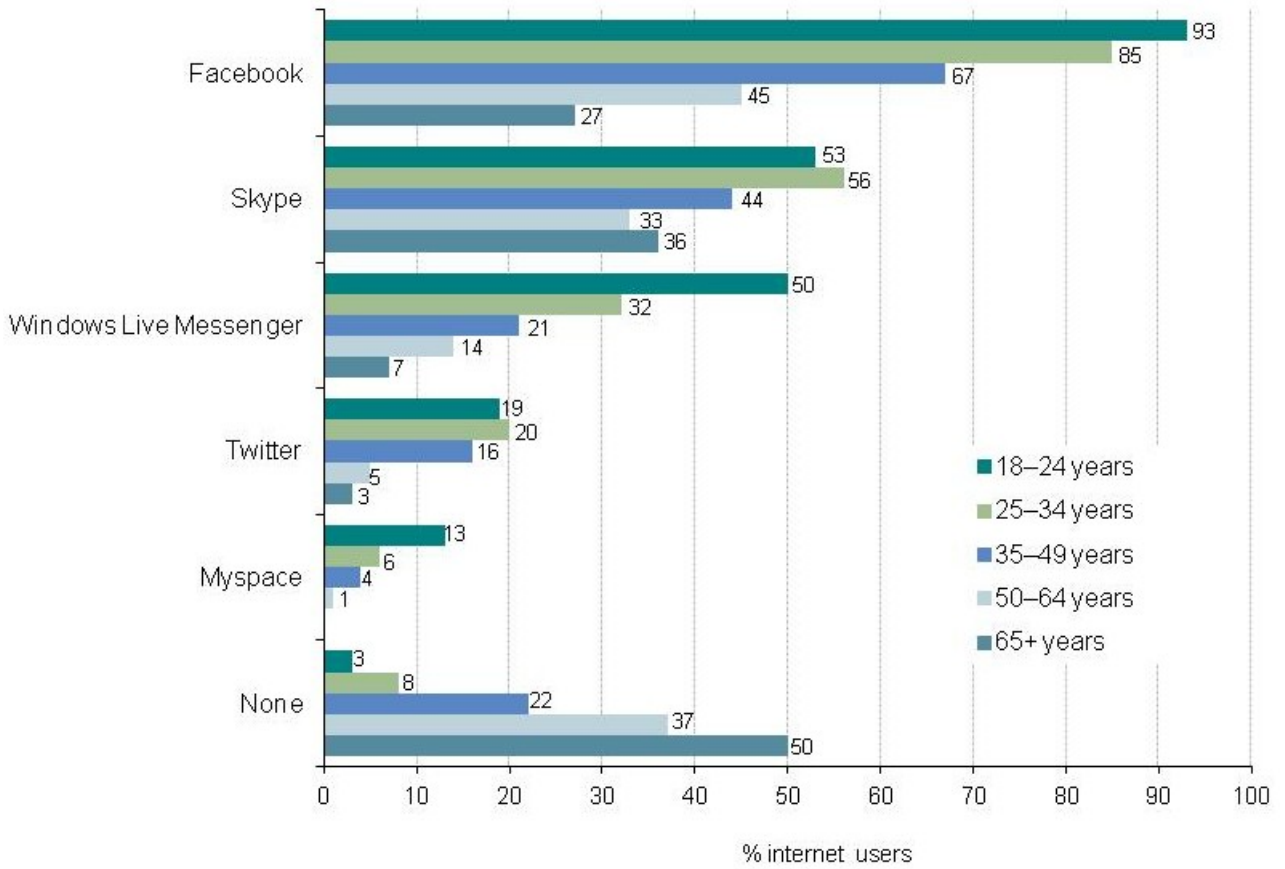
Figure 2.7 Internet users with online social media or messaging accounts



Base: Respondents who used the internet for personal purposes (n=1,257).

Internet users aged 18–34 were more likely than those aged 35 and over to access the individual social media services listed in Figure 2.8. Those aged 65 and over used Skype (36 per cent) and Facebook (27 per cent) more than other social media services.

Figure 2.8 Internet users with online social media accounts, by age



Base: Respondents who use the internet for personal purposes (n=1,257); aged 18-24 (n=148), 25-34 (n=270), 35-49 (n=364), 50-64 (n=301), 65+ (n=174).

3. Unsolicited telemarketing calls

The ACMA is responsible for the operation and enforcement of the Do Not Call Register, the *Do Not Call Register Act 2006* and related industry standards. The Do Not Call Register allows Australians who do not wish to receive telemarketing calls or marketing faxes to register their domestic telephone (landline and mobile) and fax numbers.

Telemarketing calls are calls made for the purpose of offering, advertising or promoting goods, services, and land or investments, or to solicit donations. Unsolicited telemarketing calls are calls from businesses or organisations where there has been no previous customer contact or agreement to receive calls—that is, calls made without the consent of the recipient.

Unsolicited calls must not be made to numbers on the Do Not Call Register. Certain exceptions apply for unsolicited calls authorised by government, religious organisations, charities, political parties and educational institutions. These exceptions are known as designated telemarketing calls.

This section examines:

- > the extent to which unsolicited telemarketing calls (including designated telemarketing calls) are received by Australians
- > whether or not Australians who receive these telemarketing calls perceive them to be a problem and the reasons why
- > actions taken when telemarketing calls are received.

Focus group comments—What is telemarketing?

The focus groups explored awareness and understanding of what constitutes telemarketing. Participants described telemarketing calls in various ways, including calls seeking to sell products and services, calls from charities and uninvited or annoying calls.

They're basically selling something and saying do you want to go on a holiday or do you want to buy certain things. (aged 35+)

Uninvited calls. (aged 35+)

Charity calls. (aged 35+)

Annoying phone calls when you least want to grab it. (aged 18–34)

Sales pitches for different plans or what not. (aged 18–34)

A few participants said they knew a call was from a telemarketer by the sound of the phone connection or a caller's accent.

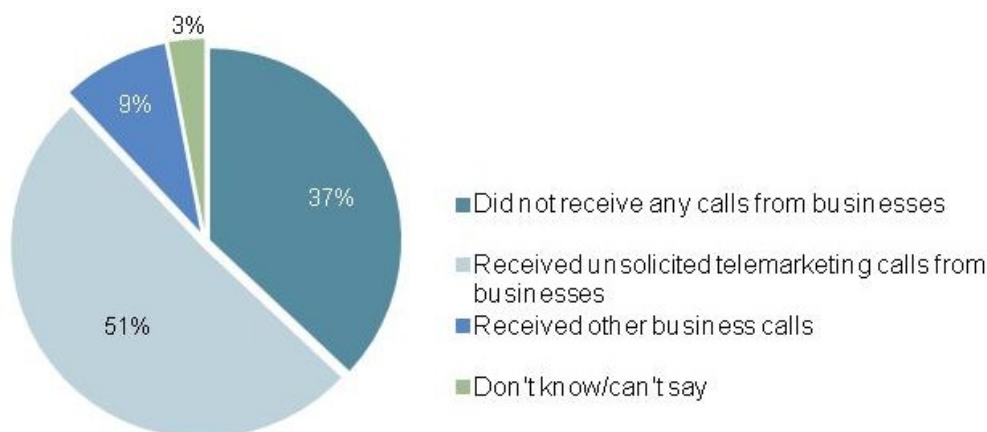
I know it sounds really bad, but as soon as you can hear that [the] phone line is from outside Australia, you just sort of go, oh, here we go, what's this going to be about? (aged 18–34)

They don't speak English. (aged 18–34)

Unsolicited calls received from businesses

The survey shows that just over half of all Australian adults (51 per cent) received at least one unsolicited telemarketing call in the last six months from a business or organisation wanting to promote or sell them something (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Australians who received telemarketing calls from businesses in last six months



Base: All adult respondents (n=1,500).

Focus group comments—What is an unsolicited telemarketing call?

Participants gave the following descriptions when asked what they understood by 'unsolicited calls' without being given any further explanation.

[It is] a call from somebody you don't have a relationship with, so it's not something like your bank or ... insurance [company]. So I suppose you don't have any [personal] relationship with that ... company. (aged 35+)

[You have] no idea how they got your number. (aged 18–34)

I think those unsolicited ones are the ones that ring, so they are ringing to talk to me but they don't know what my name is and they don't know my details. So they start wanting my personal information and I think well, if you are ringing me, you should have my personal information. I should not need to provide that to you, because then you think I wonder what they're filling out and I wonder if they are the company that they say they are. (aged 18–34)

Because they don't have my details—I only have a mobile, so if they are ringing my mobile then they should know who I am and what my name is, they should not be calling [when they are] uncertain of who they are ringing. (aged 18–34)

Some participants recognised the importance of having a previous relationship with telemarketing callers.

Well, there is some relationship. You have at one stage either had an interest, expressed an interest or taken out a product with that organisation so, unless you have actually told them 'do not call me again', I think that it's reasonably fair to expect a call. Well, it would be tolerated anyway. (aged 35+)

I think it's a bit different when you know you have had dealings with these people and when it's someone random. Oh where do you get my number from? Why are you ringing me? The trust goes a bit whereas if you had been dealing with somebody ... you go oh, I remember that. (aged 35+)

Of those who reported receiving unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses in the last six months, 18 per cent received one or more every day, 32 per cent at least once a week (but less than every day) and almost half (48 per cent) less often than once a week (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 Frequency of receiving unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses



Base: Respondents who received unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses wanting to promote or sell something (and where there had been no previous customer contact or agreement to receive calls) (n=750).

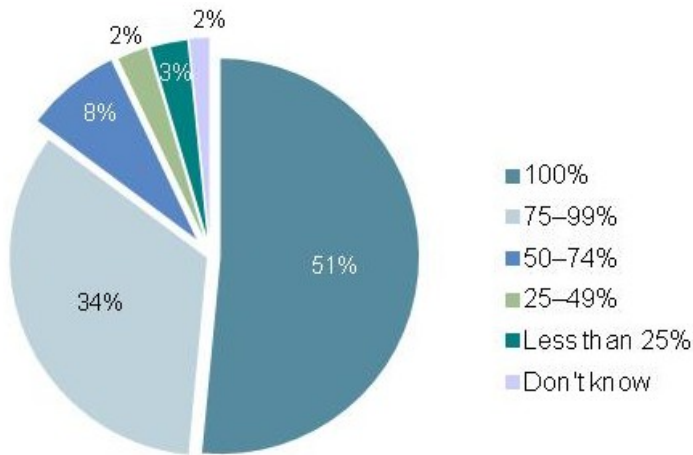
To allow comparison in this report between unsolicited telemarketing calls, spam emails and spam SMS, monthly frequency for calls received was also calculated. A total of 40 per cent of Australian adults indicated receiving unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses in a month. Of the people who received these calls, 23 per cent did so every day or more often, 42 per cent once a week or more often (but less than every day) and 35 per cent once a month or more often (but less than once a week).

Calls received on fixed-line and mobile phones

The survey results provide a number of measures indicating that most unsolicited telemarketing calls were received on fixed-line phones at home.

Of the people who received unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses in the last six months and who had both a fixed-line and mobile phone, just over half (51 per cent) received all such calls on their fixed-line home phone. A further 33 per cent received 75–99 per cent of these calls on their fixed-line phone (see Figure 3.3). This indicates that the 85 per cent of people who received unsolicited telemarketing calls received at least three-quarters of them on their home phone.

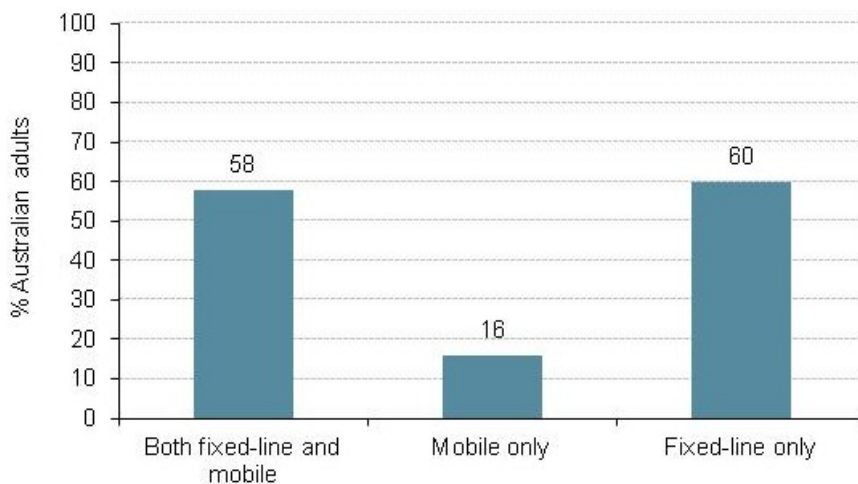
Figure 3.3 Proportion of unsolicited telemarketing calls received on fixed-line phones—where respondents have both a fixed-line and mobile phone



Base: Respondents with both fixed-line and mobile phones who received unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses wanting to promote or sell something (and where there had been no previous customer contact or agreement to receive calls) (n=598).

Unsolicited telemarketing calls were received nearly four times more often by those who only had a fixed-line home phone (60 per cent) compared to those with only a personal mobile phone (16 per cent) (see Figure 3.4).

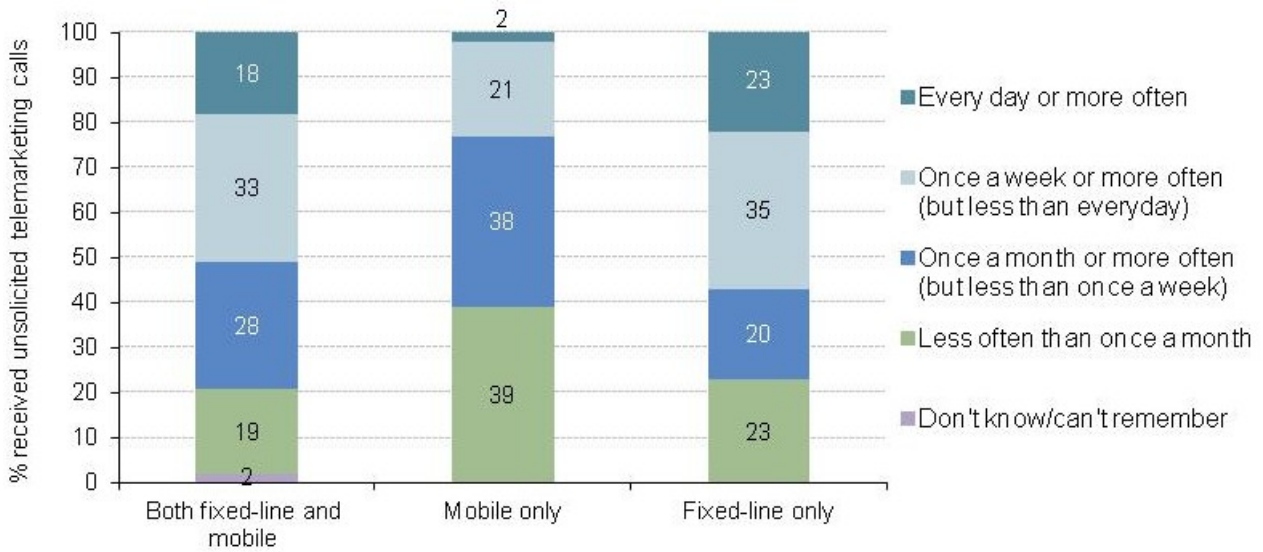
Figure 3.4 Unsolicited telemarketing calls received from businesses, by telephone type



Base: All respondents (n=1,500); both fixed-line and mobile phone (n=1,037), mobile phone only (n=293), fixed-line phone only (n=169).

People with only a fixed-line phone at home also received unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses more frequently than those with mobile phones only—58 per cent received these calls once a week or more often, compared to 23 per cent of mobile-only phone users (see Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5 Frequency of receiving unsolicited telemarketing calls, by telephone type



Base: Respondents who received unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses with both a fixed-line and mobile phone (n=598), mobile phone only (n=49), fixed-line phone only (n=102).

Caution: some small sample sizes.

Focus group comments—How often do you receive unsolicited telemarketing calls?

Participants talked about how frequently they received telemarketing calls, including when they were periodically at home, and receiving fewer calls where they did not have a fixed-line home phone.

On the landline, if I am home, they come pretty frequently, I'm not on the 'don't call us' register, so I would imagine every couple of days. (aged 18–34)

They seem to come in waves, sometimes two or three a week, or you might get one a fortnight. (aged 18–34)

I don't get telemarketing calls because I don't have a landline. (aged 18–34)

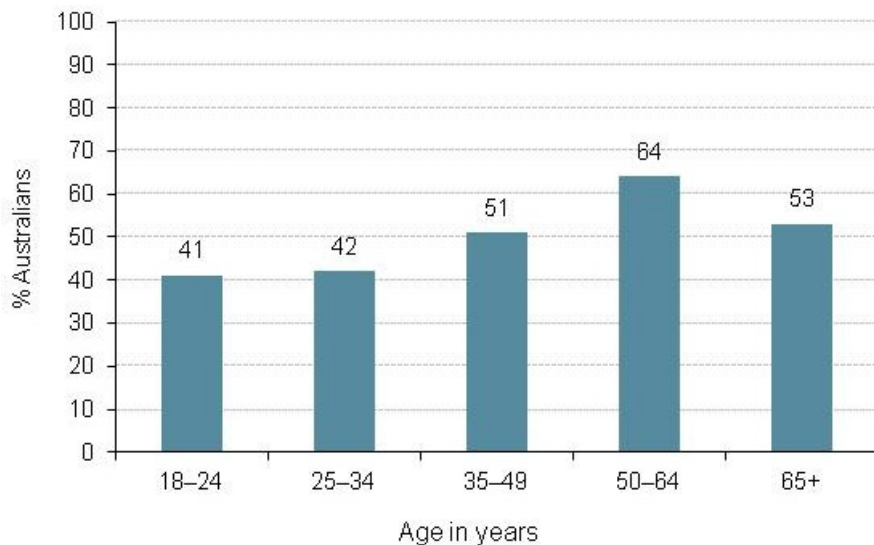
I don't get very many at all on my mobile. (aged 18–34)

Usually it is still the charities and research companies and stuff. Occasionally you get a dodgy seller. (aged 18–34)

Calls received by age

Fewer people in the 18–24 and 25–34 age groups received unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses in the previous six months, compared to those in the 50–64 and 65+ age groups. This can be attributed to younger people having lower rates of fixed-line home phone use.

Figure 3.6 Unsolicited telemarketing calls received from businesses, by age



Base: All respondents (n=1,500); aged 18-24 (n=149), 25-34 (n=283), 35-49 (n=396), 50-64 (n=378), 65+ (n=294).

Designated telemarketing calls

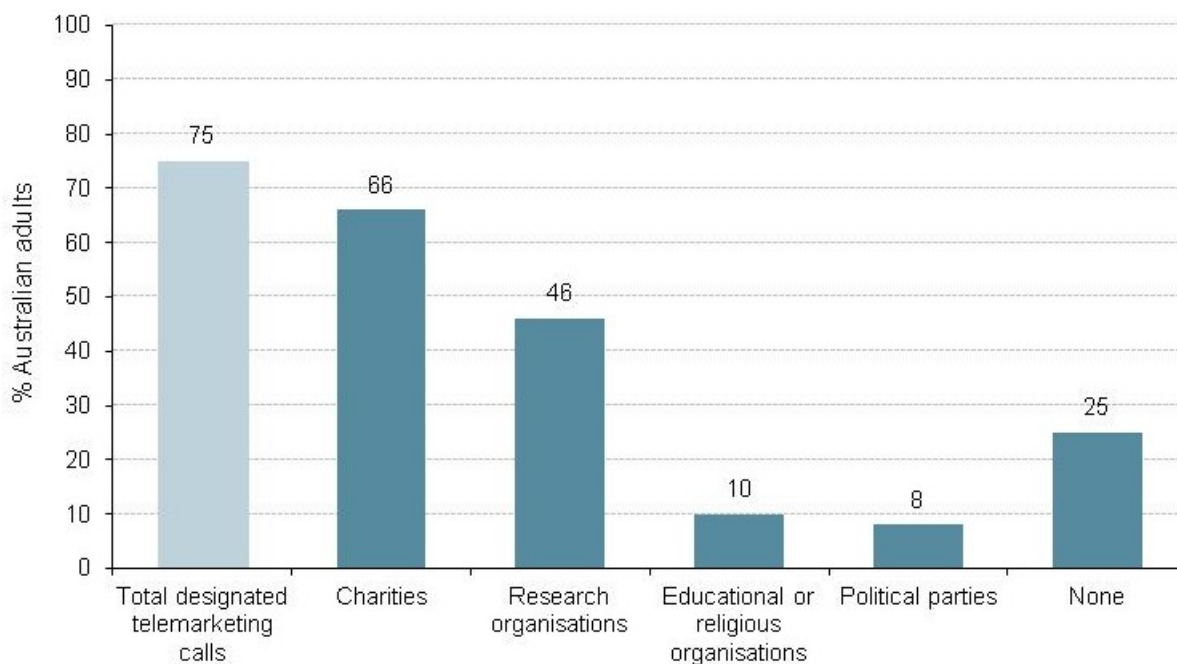
Charities, educational or religious organisations and political parties are able to make unsolicited telemarketing calls to numbers on the Do Not Call Register. When these calls are made to numbers on the register, they are referred to as 'designated unsolicited telemarketing calls'. Calls from research organisations are not considered designated telemarketing calls under the Act. However, they were included in this survey because their content and purpose falls outside the definition of telemarketing calls in the Act and so may be allowed.

Further, the survey questions on designated telemarketing calls do not distinguish between solicited and unsolicited calls unless stated otherwise.

More Australians reported receiving at least one of these types of designated telemarketing calls in the previous six months (75 per cent), higher than the proportion who received unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses over the same period (51 per cent). This most likely reflects the fact that such calls can be made to Australian numbers listed on the Do Not Call Register—unlike unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses.

The most common designated telemarketing calls received were from charities and social or market research organisations (allowable), followed by calls from educational or religious organisations and political parties (Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7 Designated telemarketing calls received in last six months



Base: All adult respondents (n=1,500).

Compared to unsolicited telemarketing calls received from businesses:

- > designated telemarketing calls were generally received by fewer people on a daily basis
- > calls from charities, educational or religious organisations were received by the same proportion of people (32 per cent) once a week or more often (but less than daily).
- > calls from research organisations and political parties were less frequent, with 45 per cent of people receiving these calls less often than once a month (see Table 3.1).

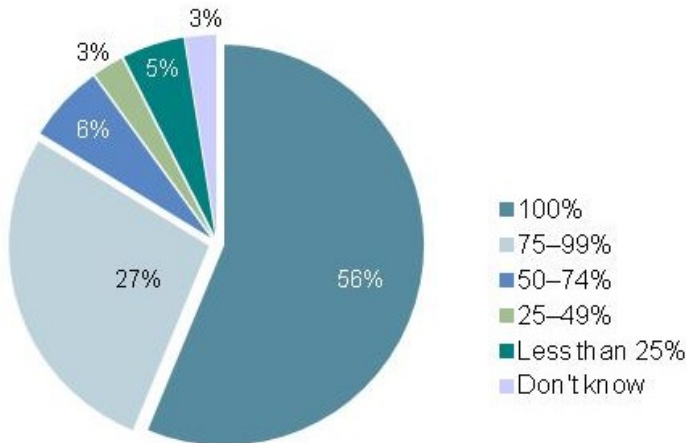
Table 3.1 Frequency of different types of telemarketing calls in last six months

Frequency	Designated calls from charities, educational and religious organisations	Designated calls from research organisations and political parties	Unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses
	% people	% people	% people
Every day or more often	9	6	18
Once a week or more often (but less than every day)	32	18	32
Once a month or more often (but less than once a week)	31	30	27
Less often than once a month	28	45	21
Don't know/can't remember	1	1	2

Base: Respondents who received calls from charities, educational or religious organisations (n=991), from research organisations or political parties (n=705), unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses (n=750).

Designated unsolicited telemarketing calls were received more commonly on fixed-line phones than on mobiles—a similar pattern to unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses (see Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8 Proportion of unsolicited designated telemarketing calls received on fixed-line phones—where respondents have both a fixed-line and mobile phone



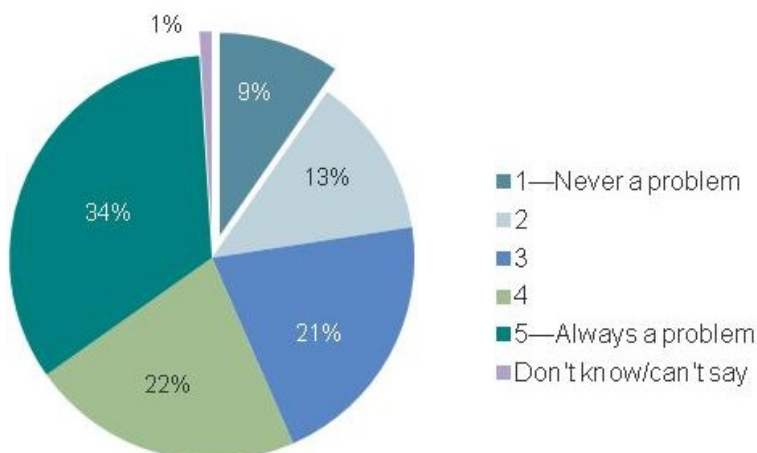
Base: Respondents with both fixed-line and mobile phones who received designated telemarketing calls (n=1,100).

Perceptions of unsolicited telemarketing calls

As part of the survey, respondents were asked how they felt about receiving unsolicited telemarketing calls generally, and to rate them on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is 'never a problem' and 5 is 'always a problem'.

Overall, unsolicited telemarketing calls were perceived as a problem to some degree by 91 per cent of recipients. Fifty-six per cent rated them as 4 (often a problem) or 5 (always a problem), including 34 per cent who gave the highest rating, while 22 per cent rated them as 1 (never a problem) or 2 (rarely a problem), including nine per cent who gave the lowest rating (see Figure 3.9).¹

Figure 3.9 Extent that unsolicited telemarketing calls are perceived as a problem

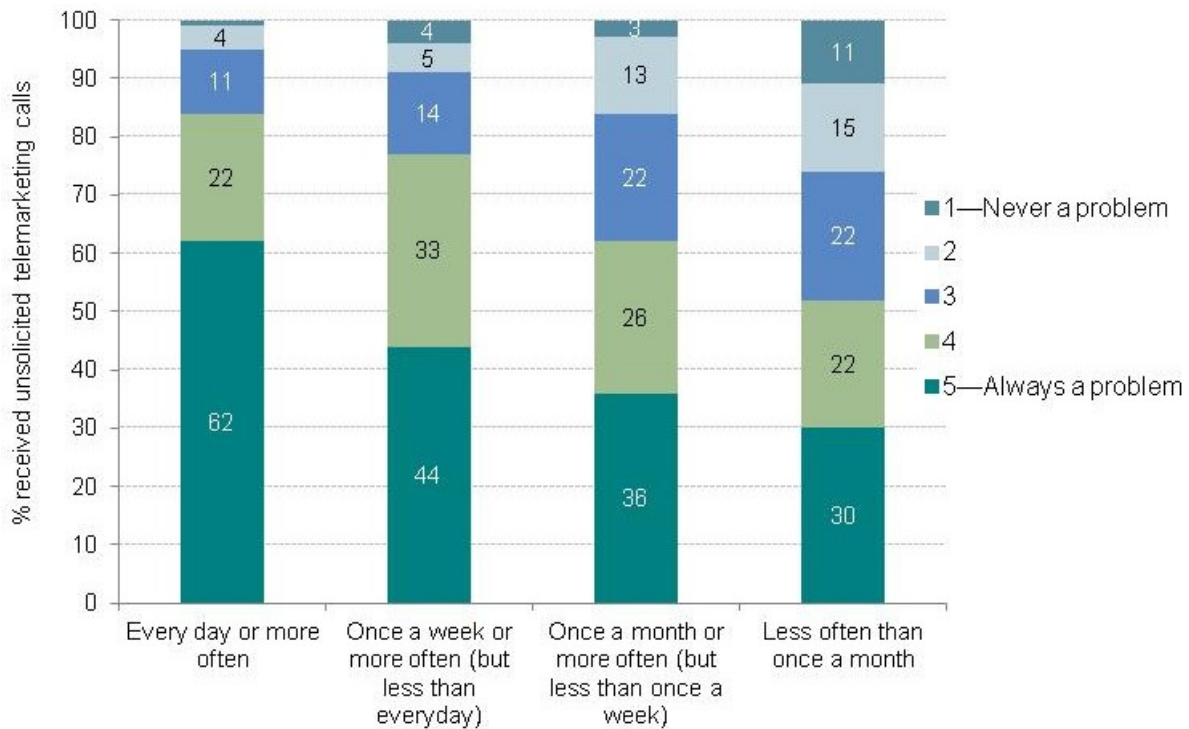


Base: Respondents who received at least one telemarketing call; that is, either unsolicited calls from businesses or designated telemarketing calls (n=1,187).

¹ Only the terms 'Never a problem' and 'Always a problem' were identified in the survey questionnaire. The descriptors 'often' (4 on the scale) and 'rarely' (2 on the scale) '... a problem' are included in this report for convenience.

The extent to which people perceived unsolicited telemarketing calls to be a problem was also influenced by their frequency. When these calls were received every day or more often, 84 per cent saw them as always or often a problem. This declined to 52 per cent when their frequency was less than once a month (see Figure 3.10). A similar pattern applies to designated telemarketing calls.

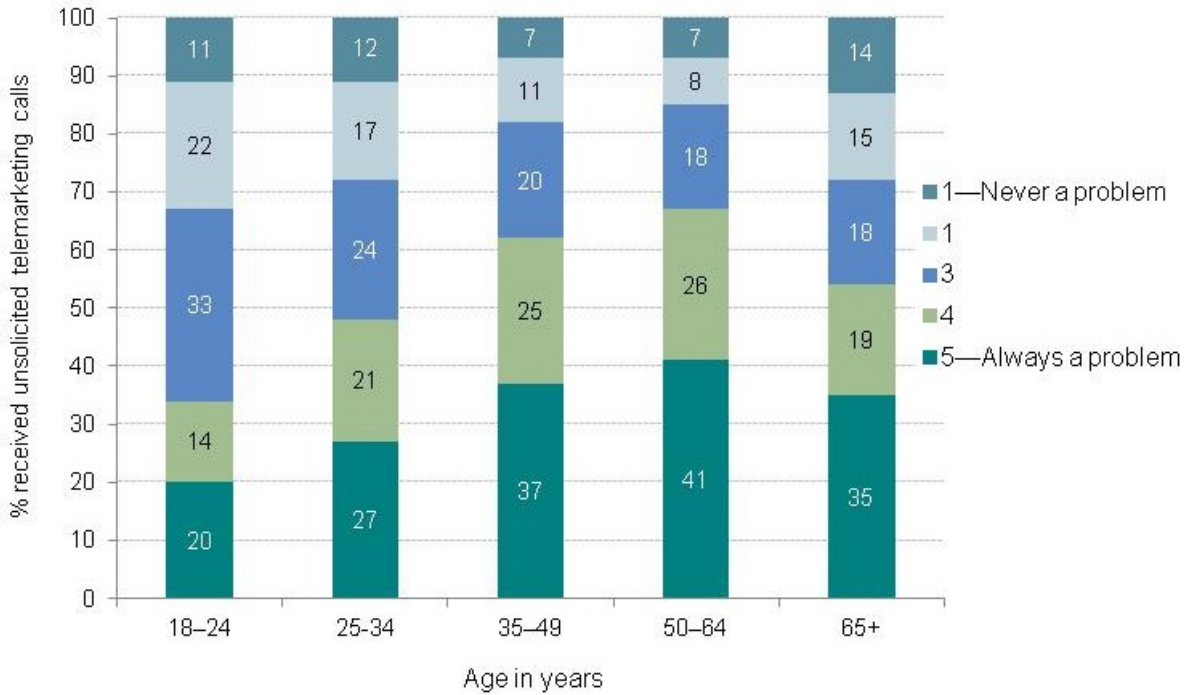
Figure 3.10 Extent that unsolicited telemarketing calls are perceived as a problem, by frequency



Base: Respondents who received unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses in the last six months (n=750); every day or more often (n=133), once a week or more often (n=243), once a month or more often (n=205), less often than once a month (n=160).

Fewer young adults found unsolicited telemarketing calls generally to be always or often a problem (34 per cent of those aged 18–24) than those aged 50–64 (67 per cent) (see Figure 3.11). As noted previously, the lower proportion of young adults who perceived these calls to be a problem was underpinned by their lower rates of fixed-line telephone use.

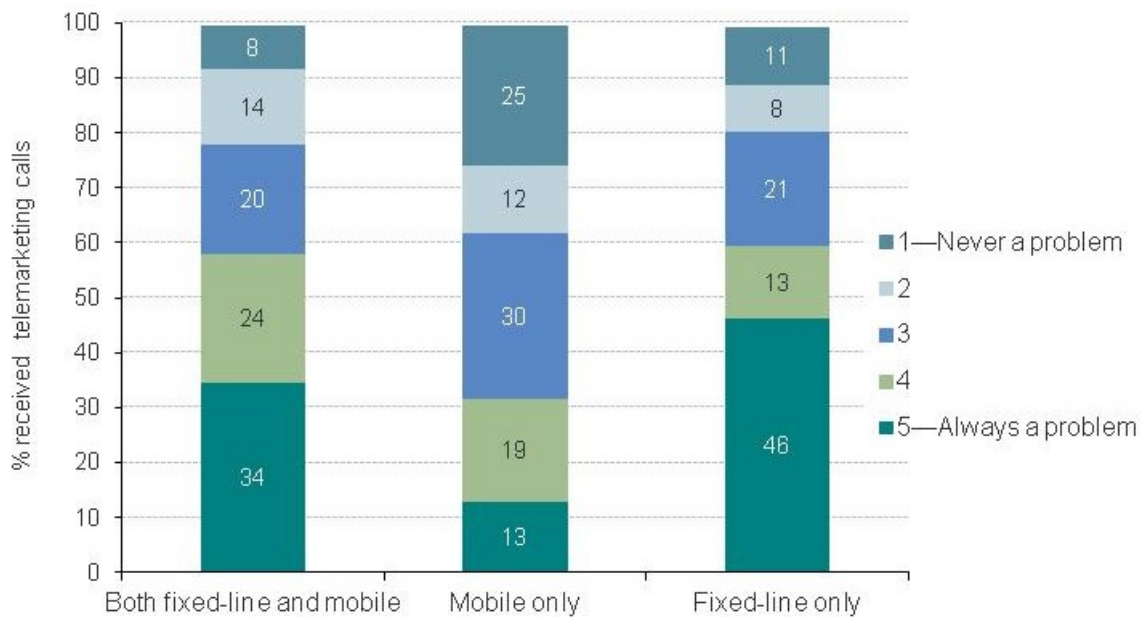
Figure 3.11 Extent that unsolicited telemarketing calls are perceived as a problem, by age



Base: Respondents who received unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses or designated telemarketing calls (n=1,187); aged 18-24 (n=102), 25-34 (n=187), 35-49 (n=325), 50-64 (n=322), 65+ (n=251).

The relationship between frequent telemarketing calls being perceived as a problem and their mainly being received on fixed-line phones is further illustrated in Figure 3.12. Users of only fixed-line phones who received telemarketing calls were more likely to find them to be always a problem (46 per cent) than mobile-only users (13 per cent).

Figure 3.12 Extent that telemarketing calls are perceived as a problem, by telephone type



Base: Respondents who received either unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses or designated telemarketing calls (n=1,187); both fixed-line and mobile phone (n=915); mobile phone only (n=123); fixed-line phone only (n=148).

Why calls are perceived as a problem

Telemarketing calls were considered a problem because recipients regarded them as annoying or a nuisance (38 per cent), they were received at inappropriate times (36 per cent)—including dinnertime (17 per cent)—and they interrupted people’s peace and quiet (nine per cent) (see Table 3.2). These reasons were reported by a total of 65 per cent of recipients.

Recipients who did not perceive telemarketing calls as a problem liked doing surveys and donating (five per cent) and found it easy to say no to callers if they were not interested (four per cent).

Table 2.2 Why telemarketing calls are, or are not, perceived as a problem

Why calls are a problem	People who received telemarketing calls and rated them (%)
Nuisance; annoying	38
TOTAL always call me at an inappropriate time or dinner time	36
<i>Always call me at an inappropriate time</i>	28
<i>Always call me at dinner time</i>	17
I don't like doing surveys/being asked for money	11
Interrupts my peace and quiet	9
Do not understand them; have a strong accent	6
Pushy/aggressive sales tactics; charities and sales staff will not take no for an answer	4
Concerned about how they got my personal details	4
Not interested in buying their product; product not relevant to me; not interested in what they have to say	4
Always call me even though I ask them to remove me from their list	4
Too many calls; called frequently	3
If I wanted to buy their product or donate to that charity I would search them out myself	2
Scam calls; I receive scam calls (e.g. computer support scam calls)	2
Do not like unsolicited calls; do not know caller	2
Other (includes: cannot afford to donate/buy; am on the DNCR but still received calls; I have donated but the same charities call me; don't like overseas call centres; rude call centre staff)	1 each
Why calls are not a problem	People who received telemarketing calls and rated them (%)
I like doing surveys/donating	5
It is easy to say no if I am not interested/I say no if I am not interested	4
Not many calls/called infrequently	2
I'm usually not busy	2
Not annoyed/bothered by receiving calls	2
Polite call centre staff/callers accept it politely when I say no	2
I usually hang up/I just hang up if I am not interested	2
Reasons for being neutral	People who received telemarketing calls and rated them (%)
My reaction depends on when and why they are calling/depends on what they are selling/depends on which charity it is/etc.	2
Other	7

Base: Respondents who received either unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses or designated telemarketing calls and gave a rating of how problematic the calls are to them (n=1,181).

Focus group comments—Perceptions of telemarketing calls

Participants talked about the different types of telemarketing calls they received. Many did not mind receiving calls from charities, callers who provide information about themselves early in the call, calls they can easily end or make another time to be contacted, and calls from businesses with whom they have dealt previously. They were less comfortable with callers who try to sell something to them, and who are pushy and difficult to control.

Yes, I got one recently from the Heart Foundation, the same thing, asking me if I would do some collection at some houses, and for personal reasons I said yes. (aged 35+)

It depends what kind of company is calling you. If you say that you can't talk straight away and they're fine with that and let you go, that's fine. I don't think that's invasive. I think why not, that's their job, they've got to do it, they've got to find out their information somehow, and that person ringing me doesn't bother me if I say no. (aged 18–34)

I don't mind the charity ones either. They are normally pretty polite and if you say 'no' it's fine, but it's the ones that call you and you say no, and then they call you again in an hour or two. (aged 18–34)

My financial institution has called me a couple of times and it is clearly a sales division trying to sell me a credit card or whatever, but I think there's more capacity to listen to those, for a few minutes anyway, than someone out of the blue. (aged 18–34)

I feel more comfortable if I know who they are, like if they are upfront with me at the beginning I feel more comfortable to hear them out than if they are just trying to—the more information you know about them, the more comfortable you are going to feel talking to them. (aged 18–34)

I like when they actually give you the option, when they're like 'have you got time to speak about this now?' and then you've got a little bit of control [and say] like 'no, actually, maybe call me later' instead of them rambling on and you're like 'what are you selling again?', like I had a second to say that. (aged 18–34)

However, other participants were less patient with telemarketing callers.

I only worked [making telemarketing calls] for like three months ... you guys definitely have the control, because we're just some idiot calling up and you can just hang up at any moment, and I'd do [that in] like three seconds ... [although] there were definitely tactics to keep people talking, for sure. (aged 18–34)

Some participants supported greater awareness about telemarketing calls. In particular, that people should be more aware when completing forms that sell personal information to third parties, when agreeing to be contacted again or included in a database that could be used for marketing purposes. One person was in favour of more regulation.

I got a call from a carpet cleaner ... that I had used three years ago and they said I have just moved. I said no, I have been here for 12 years and it was someone else who I was organising carpet cleaning for that time ago. They said well, you're on our books and do you need carpet cleaning at all? I said I know exactly what to do and I said how come you have got my number? They said well, you have used us. I had called them on behalf of someone else and so she's obviously got me on her little database but I didn't ask to go on her database. (aged 35+)

What I'm saying is [that] maybe we all need to be a bit more aware ... We're so busy filling out forms sometimes that we probably don't [realise what we are signing up for]. Someone needs to say [that] by ticking that box down there, you're agreeing that I can market [to] you. (aged 35+)

Well, I would like to see it more regulated because I think it's out of control. It really just gives me the shits if I'm honest. (aged 35+)

Actions taken in response to calls

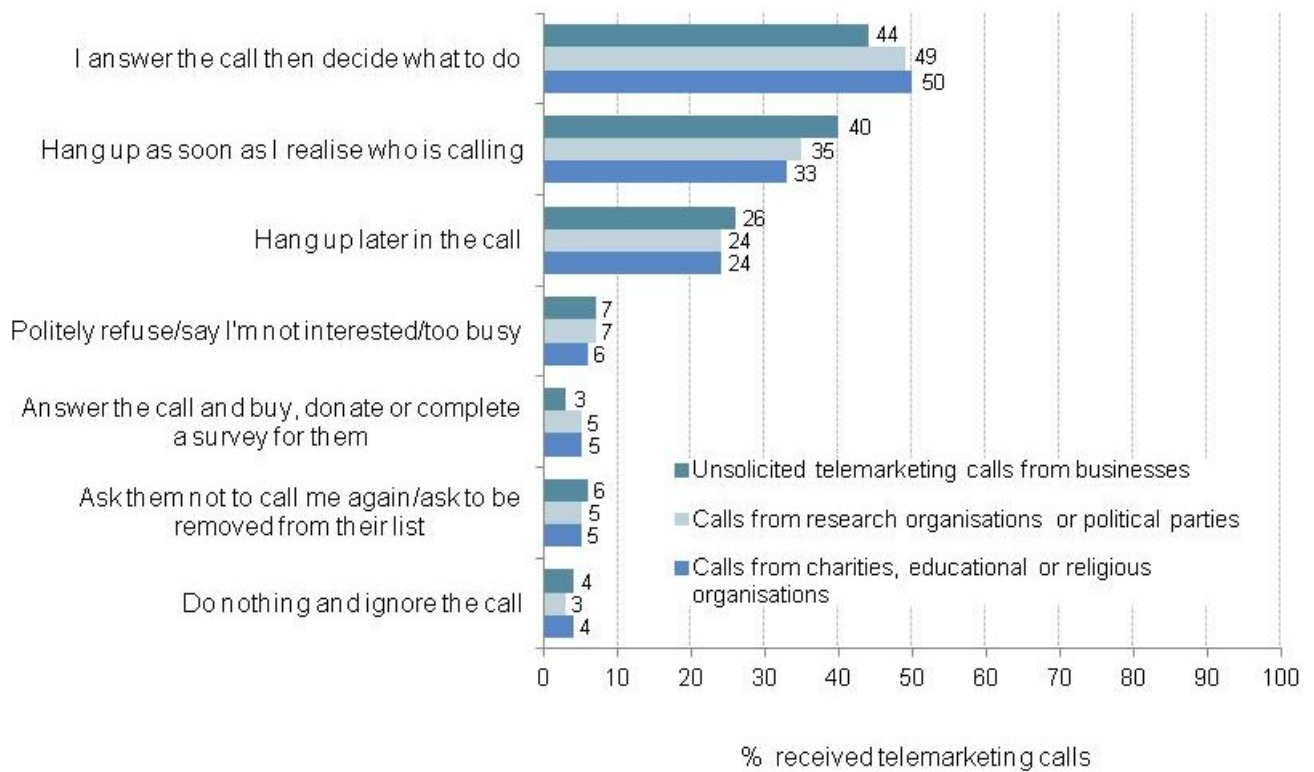
Survey respondents were asked an open-ended (and unprompted) question about what actions they take when receiving a telemarketing call.

The most commonly reported action was to answer the call and then decide what to do (an average of 49 per cent), followed by hanging up either as soon as they realise who is calling (33 per cent) or at some point later in the call (23 per cent).

A small proportion of people (five per cent) reported they had donated money to a charity, completed a survey or bought something from the caller. The same proportion had asked them not to call again or to be removed from their call list (see Figure 3.13).

Smaller groups of people said they ask the caller how they got their number, led them on or played games with the caller, or made a complaint (one per cent for each action).

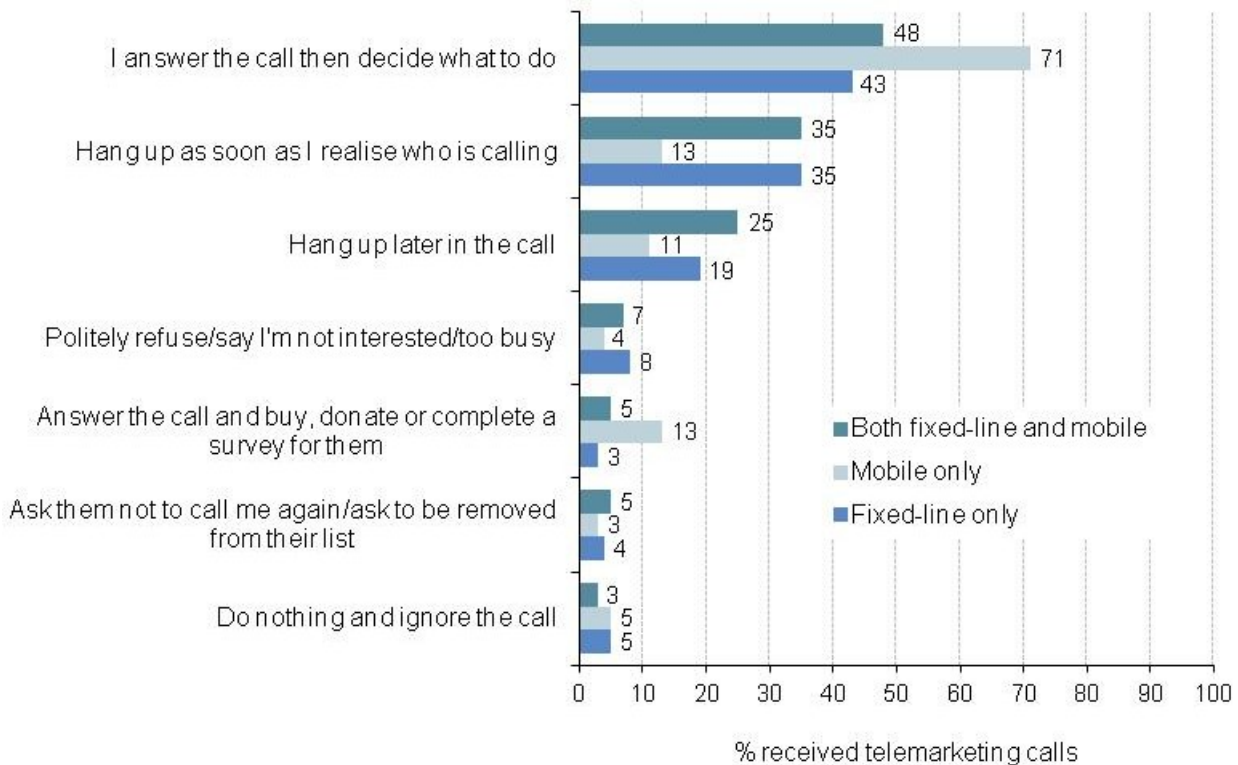
Figure 3.13 Actions taken in response to receiving telemarketing calls



Base: Respondents who received unsolicited telemarketing calls from businesses (n=750); received designated telemarketing calls from research organisations or political parties (n=705); and designated telemarketing calls from charities, educational or religious organisations (n=991).

People with fixed-line phones only at home tended to react differently to those with mobiles only. The former were more likely to hang up on telemarketers as soon as they realise who is calling (35 per cent) or hang up later in the call (19 per cent) than people who used mobile phones only (13 and 11 per cent respectively).

Figure 3.14 Actions taken in response to telemarketing calls, by phone type



Base: Respondents who received at least one telemarketing call (n=1,187); with both a fixed-line and mobile phone (n=1,064), mobile phone only (n=123), fixed-line phone only (n=148).

Only the most common actions are shown.

Focus group comments—Age differences

Younger focus group participants were generally less likely to be abrupt or hang up on telemarketers. Most participants aged 18–34 said they tried to be polite and did not hang up on telemarketing callers; older participants did not think it rude to hang up on them.

I try to shut them up first as politely as possible without just hanging up. (aged 18–34)

You don't want to be rude and just hang up, but sometimes you just want to. (aged 18–34)

Because I feel bad for the person at the other end [I don't hang up]. That is their job. (aged 18–34)

I used to say 'you know, I'm not interested' but then you get the 'well, tell me why' ... It's just like it's gotten easier now just to hang up, and I think [I] don't have to be polite. I didn't ask you to call, it's rude of you to invade my privacy. (aged 35+)

Most of the time I will hang up too, but if I have got the time or I have bothered to talk to them, one of the first things I ask them is how did they get my number and sometimes you can get through to a process where they say they'll take it off, but whether they have, I don't know—most of the time I just hang up because it's timed poorly. (aged 35+)

The fact that you have to speak to them. Sometimes you just [try] without being rude—I don't like being rude but I find sometimes I have to be rude to get rid of them and I have actually hung up on them and they have rung me back. (aged 35+)

4. Spam email and SMS messages

Under the *Spam Act 2003*, it is illegal to send, or cause to be sent, unsolicited commercial electronic messages. This Act covers email, instant messaging, SMS and MMS (text- and image-based mobile phone messaging) and relates to both messages that advertise and/or promote goods and services and scams.

This section examines:

- > the extent to which Australians receive spam emails and SMS messages
- > whether or not Australians who receive spam perceive it to be a problem and the reasons why
- > actions taken when spam messages are received.

Focus group comments—What is spam?

Most participants generally understood the concept of spam, describing it as junk, unauthorised (messages they had not agreed to receive) or random messages from companies they had nothing to do with.

Junk emails. (aged 18–34)

Unauthorised, you're not a member and you haven't asked for anything but it comes through. (aged 18–34)

Unauthorised rubbish and bits of things. (aged 18–34)

That's just anything that has got nothing to do with anything about you ... the[se] people are trying to sell or give away or defraud you in some sort of way. (aged 35+)

There are two categories in my mind, one is I can see where it has come from, so if I signed up [to] something online ... Then there's the random stuff. (aged 18–34)

It's different, like if the local pet shop sends you an email with their latest sales or something, which they got that email from the loyalty card ... but most of those things you sign up for, you tick a box saying 'wish to receive' so therefore if you are willing to receive it, it's not really spam. (aged 18–34)

Other participants were less certain about spam, and included in their definition of spam commercial messages that recipients had consented to receive.

Spam is something that is just generated through our email and I don't get the purpose of the spam. I think it is probably to get bank details, but scam ... I don't know. (aged 18–34)

[Even emails that you've consented to receive can be spam] if it's frequent enough and it annoys you enough. I suppose it can definitely be classed as [spam]. (aged 35+)

I think if they do contact, they have to have the opt-in/opt-out option. I've gotten messages before where they haven't and that's frustrating, because you go to reply to say cancel me off this list and then you get the message back saying message not delivered. (aged 18–34)

Participants described scams as messages that use various techniques to dishonestly obtain payment or personal details. Poor written expression in messages helped some participants identify them as scams.

Trying to get my money or my details. (aged 35+)

Those lottery ones. [They say] you [have] won the lottery and all you have to do is this, that, and the other. (aged 35+)

On the mobiles, your mobile phone has won so much money ... (aged 35+)

You can get email ones as well, saying you have won money, reply to this email with your details and we will transfer the money to your bank account. (aged 18–34)

Pharmaceutical ones that say all sorts of [things] ... (aged 18–34)

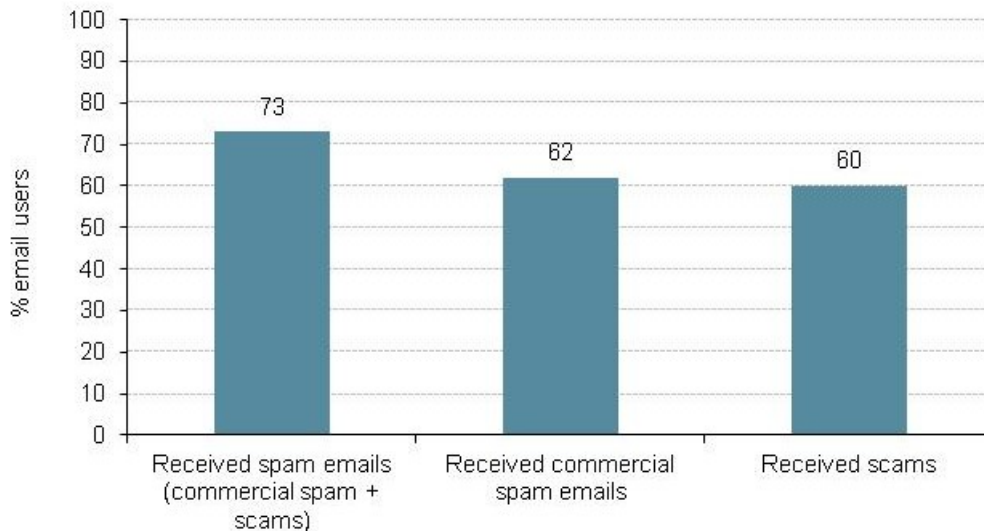
[They have] bad grammar and English which isn't their first language. (aged 18–34)

Spam email received

Sixty-one per cent of Australian adults (or 73 per cent of people with a personal email address) reported receiving spam emails in the previous month. This includes 62 per cent who received commercial spam and 60 per cent who received scam messages (see Figure 4.1).

There were no marked differences in the incidence of receiving spam emails between age groups or the different types of email accounts used.

Figure 4.1 Email users who received spam emails in the previous month

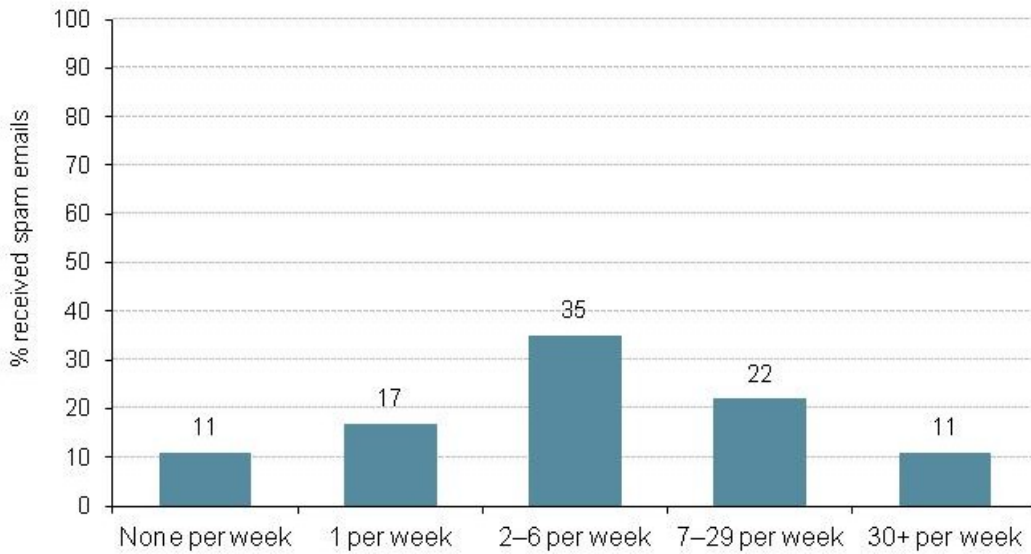


Base: Respondents who have a personal email address (n=1,219).

People with an email address they used for personal purposes were asked how many spam emails they typically received in their inbox (not including their spam or junk folders if applicable). Those who didn't know whether or not they had a spam filter were not asked this question.

Eleven per cent of spam email recipients reported receiving at least one spam email in their inbox in the last month (but none in a typical week), 52 per cent received one to six emails a week and one-third received seven or more in a typical week (see Figure 4.2). Age and other demographic factors, including the main type of email account used, do not have an impact on the number of spam emails received in inboxes.

Figure 4.2 Number of spam emails received in the last month

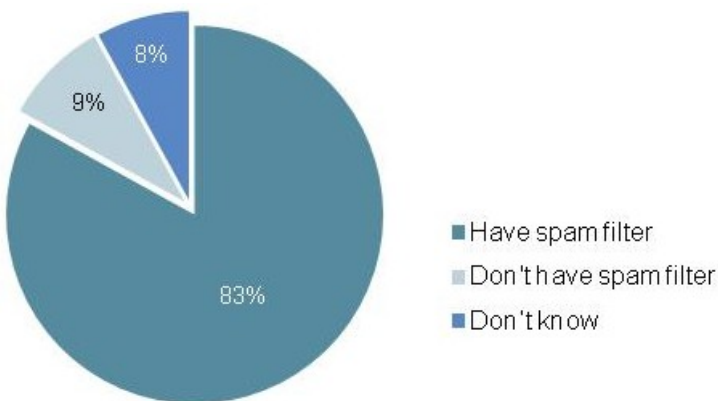


Base: Respondents who received spam emails in the last month and said whether or not they have a spam filter (n=836).

Email users were also asked if they had a spam or junk mail filter for the email address they used most often, with 83 per cent saying they had such a filter (see Figure 4.3). However, other information obtained from this survey suggests these findings on the penetration of spam filters are unclear and might indicate that some email users have a filter but are not aware of it.

There were only minor differences in the use of spam filters between different age groups and income brackets.

Figure 4.3 Use of spam email filters by personal email users



Base: Respondents who have a personal email address (n=1,219).

Focus group comments—How much spam?

The reach of spam was evident in the focus groups, with the vast majority of participants saying they had received spam emails. Some had opened messages from familiar businesses even if they considered them to be spam. In general, commercial messages were considered preferable to scam messages. Some participants had also responded to scams.

The only ones that I would go in and read like that are the ones from [a supermarket that] I know ... (aged 18–34)

I check my mail on [my mobile] phone all the time, so I consider that almost as accessible as a text message ... and the junk mail is usually full of newsletters and whatever, but that's better than getting those emails where there's like 'click on this link now to win a prize for all your friends'. (aged 18–34)

Like this bank, I did have some money in it and they were asking me to update my internet banking but I don't internet bank with that bank, so alarm bells [rang] but it's scary because they knew that I actually bank with the ANZ. (aged 35+)

I was naive enough a long time ago to put my bank account number into a scam email and had all of my money taken out. (aged 18–34)

I did once, I was stupid, when I was younger there was some diet pill thing, it looked like it was either from here or America, [a] trial or whatever ... and you give them your credit card details. (aged 18–34)

I have a home email address and I check it once a week, and it is normally downloading 450 messages. (aged 35+)

I'm pretty slack, I let them build up and build up and build up, and once I'd got like 3,000 messages. (aged 18–34)

Some participants mentioned the use of spam email filters, which were generally regarded as effective at blocking and managing spam.

The spam filters are pretty good, so usually I only have to look into the junk mail folders and then it's just a question of click 'delete all'. (aged 35+)

That [spam filter] is just fantastic ... as soon as you list something as spam, it sends it to [the] spam filter [folder], they then analyse it and if 10 more people [send it to their spam folder] it is automatically blocked for you and I haven't had spam on our computer for probably a couple of years now. It's just a fantastic system. (aged 35+)

What I do most of the time nowadays is just set the filter on high and then go into the junk email [folder] if I'm expecting an email from one that's not on the safe list. So as opposed to looking through trash, you're looking for one email that's got your name or something [on it], and it [is] ... better that way otherwise your inbox would be constantly going 'you've got new email'. (aged 18–34)

Perceptions of spam email

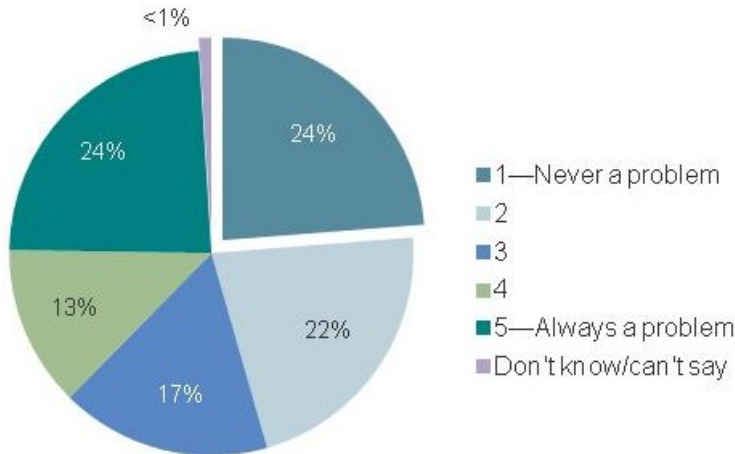
Survey respondents who received spam were asked how they felt about receiving spam emails, and to rate them on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'never a problem' and 5 is 'always a problem'.

Nearly half (46 per cent) of people who received spam emails in the previous month found them not particularly problematic by rating them 1 'never' or 2 'rarely' a problem, while 37 per cent rated them as always or often a problem (see Figure 4.4).²

² Only the terms 'Never a problem' and 'Always a problem' were identified in the survey questionnaire. The descriptors 'often' (4 on the scale) and 'rarely' (2 on the scale) '... a problem' are included in this report for convenience.

Demographic factors had little impact on how users perceived problematic spam emails. An analysis by age showed minor differences between the various age groups, with the only notable difference being that adults aged 65 years and over were less likely to consider spam emails always or often a problem (points 4 or 5 on the scale).

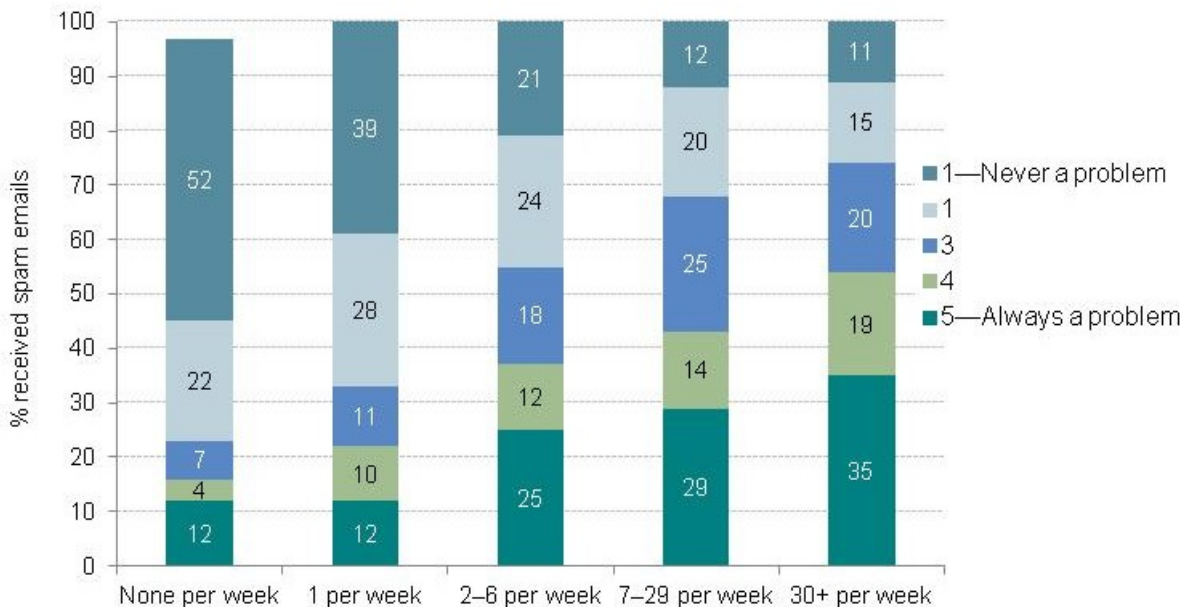
Figure 4.4 Extent that spam emails are perceived as a problem



Base: Respondents who received spam emails in the last month (n=890).

The frequency with which spam was received affected perceptions of whether spam emails were problematic. The more spam emails received on average in a typical week, the more likely people were to report them as a problem—54 per cent of those who received 30 or more spam emails per week rated them on the higher points of the scale (4 and 5), compared to 22 per cent of those who received one per week (see Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5 Extent that spam emails are perceived as a problem, by number of spam emails received in last month



Base: Respondents who know whether or not they have a spam filter and received spam emails in the last week (n=836); received no spam emails in a typical week (n=93), one (n=140), two to six (n=300), seven to 29 (n=183), 30 or more (n=95), don't know/can't say/refused (n=25).

Why spam emails are perceived as a problem

One in five recipients of spam emails in the last month found them to be a problem because they were a nuisance or annoying (19 per cent). Other reasons included the fact that these emails cluttered up their inbox and were time-consuming to delete (17 per cent), and they may contain malware or a virus (seven per cent). Users also disliked receiving unsolicited emails (five per cent) (see Table 4.1).

The main reason recipients did not consider spam emails a problem was because they were easy to recognise and delete (36 per cent). Other reasons included the effectiveness of spam filters that gather spam together where they can be easily deleted (12 per cent), because very few spam emails were received (six per cent) and email users were not bothered or annoyed by the spam emails received (three per cent).

Table 4.1 Why spam emails are, or are not, perceived as a problem

Why spam emails are a problem	People who received spam email and rated them (%)
Nuisance; annoying	19
Clutter up my inbox and are time-consuming to delete	17
Contain malware/virus; children in household might open the emails and infect computer with malware/virus	7
Do not like receiving unsolicited emails; I do not know the sender	5
Content/subject matter is inappropriate/pornographic/not relevant to me	4
They are criminals/scammers; emails are fraudulent/dangerous	4
Dislike having to add senders to block list; spam source address changes often and have to update block list of filter	3
Frequently get spam emails; I get a lot of spam	2
Hard to recognise if spam or scam; I have to open/read them to work out what they are	2
Concerned about how they got my email address	2
Concerned that other people may fall for the scam	1
Why spam emails are not a problem	People who received spam email and rated them (%)
Easy to recognise spam or scam emails and delete them; know enough to recognise and delete them; I just delete them	36
Spam filter sends them to junk folder; spam filter automatically deletes them	12
Infrequent; receive very few spam emails	6
Not bothered/ annoyed by them	3

Base: Respondents who have received spam emails in the last month and gave a rating of how problematic they are (n=882).

Focus group comments—Perceptions of receiving spam emails

A common theme raised in focus groups was that spam emails were less intrusive than telemarketing calls or spam SMS. Some participants explained that a ringing phone or message notifications distracted them from what they are doing. It was also observed that spam emails were less intrusive because they sit in an email inbox that requires no immediate attention and can be dealt with at a later time that suits the recipient.

Telemarketing [is] probably [more of a problem] because you have actually got to hear someone. The spam you see, you just go delete, delete, delete—one click, gone, whereas [for] a telemarketer even five seconds or 10 seconds is still too long. (aged 35+)

It's annoying on the phone because it's happening when you're maybe doing something, whereas the ones on the computer you're actually sitting on the computer and it doesn't worry [you]. (aged 35+)

I think you just get so bludgeoned by it [spam emails] you just become used to it and then you just deal with it. I think it's inevitable. (aged 35+)

All businesses now are marketing online and every time you go and buy something from someone they want all your contact details ... If you're in [a] business, you would want to be marketing [it] and that's just part of marketing and some of it goes to spam. Some of it's trashy but I think you have got to [accept it]—I don't see how we can stop that if everyone wants to be online marketing. That's the way of the electronic age. (aged 35+)

I lost control of mine [emails] ... I must have gone on a holiday or something and it was like in the thousands of unread mail, and I just cannot be bothered ... (aged 18–34)

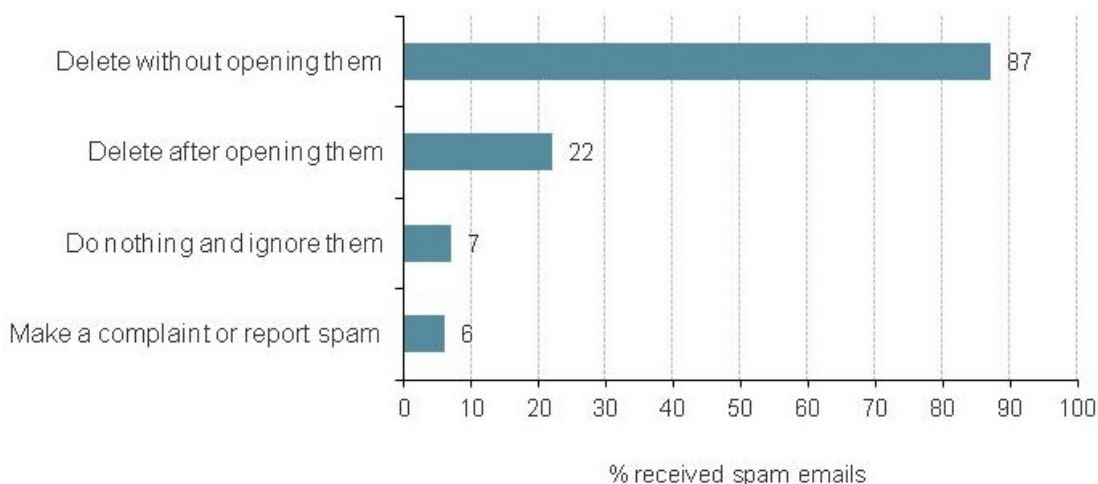
One participant who used a smartphone to read emails found it very frustrating receiving email notifications when they were spam emails.

It's irritating, having a notification for something that's rubbish. (aged 18–34)

Actions taken in response to spam emails

The most common actions taken in response to spam emails were to delete them without opening them (87 per cent) and to delete them after opening them (22 per cent) (see Figure 4.6).

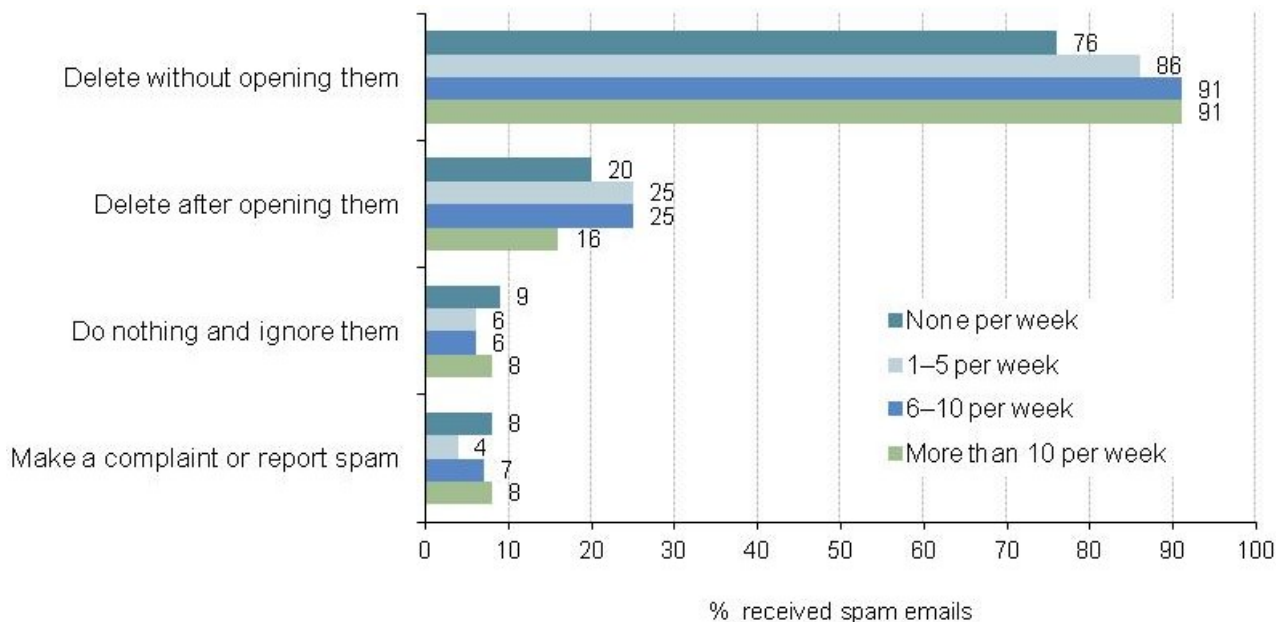
Figure 4.6 Top four actions taken in response to spam emails



Base: Respondents who received spam emails in the last month (n=890).

Those people who received more spam emails were more likely to delete them without opening them than those who received fewer emails (see Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7 Top four responses to spam emails, by number received in last month



Base: Respondents who know whether or not they have a spam filter and received spam emails in the last month (n=836); received no spam emails in a typical week in the last month (n=93), one to five (n=404), six to 10 (n=126), more than 10 (n=188).

Focus group comments—Actions in response to spam emails

Some participants said they just deleted an email because they were unsure what it was. Others read through the email to see the content, while some said they were able to determine if the email is spam by reading the subject line.

I'm too scared to open it in case my whole computer crashes, so I just delete it. I don't even read it. If I don't know the sender, I just delete it. (aged 35+)

After a while you begin to recognise what it is just from the line inside the subject and where it's from and this is rubbish. (aged 35+)

Flag it as junk and delete it. (aged 18–34)

I'm more trusting of the ones that I've had dealings with. I'm happy to go through their emails and have a look [at] what they've got on offer, and if it clicks through to their website. I will delete it if it's not interesting, but if it's someone I've never heard of or never had dealings with then I'll most likely just delete it. (aged 18–34)

I just generally go through the email address[es]. If it sounds funny then more than likely it is, so I don't even open them. They just get stuck in the filter and [I] just delete immediately. (aged 35+)

Some participants agreed that having to delete spam emails is frustrating but see it as just a part of using email.

I was going through and deleting them all—it's a weekly thing that I have to do now, it's a bit frustrating ... anyway ... I've just kind of accepted that it's something I have to do every day. (aged 18–34)

I used to [regularly delete spam emails], but I got really frustrated because I would leave it for a day and find 50 emails there and I'd have to go through them all, so I'd spend a good couple of hours going through the ones that I didn't want anymore and opting out of all of them (aged 18–34)

I don't [know] any other way to fight it [email spam]. I don't know what I could do. (aged 35+)

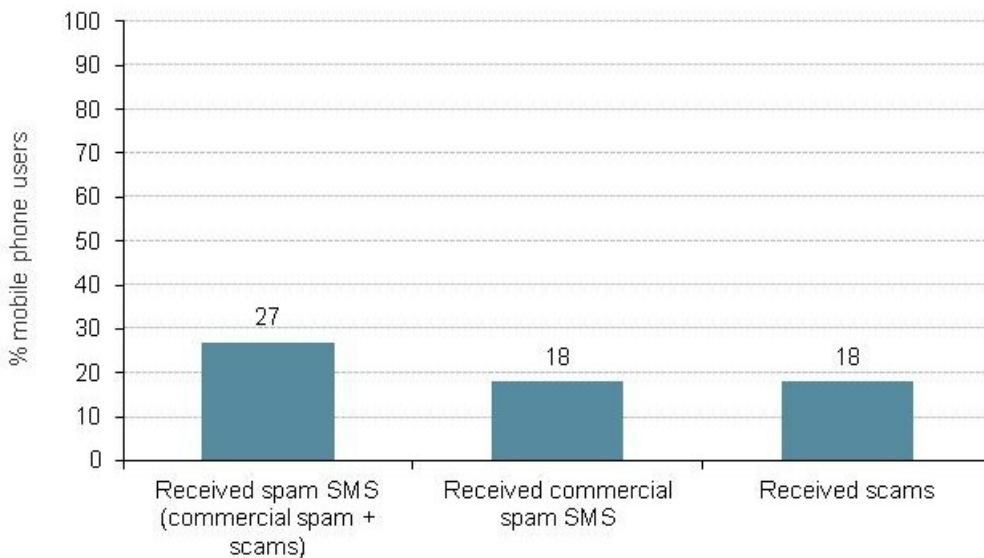
It comes with it, like, it is like you go into your junk email and go 'oh my god look at all this junk mail!' It is part of it, this is what happens. It seems like it is never going to be prevented so you just deal with it. (aged 18–34)

Spam SMS received

Almost one-quarter (24 per cent) of Australian adults (or 27 per cent of mobile phone users) reported receiving spam SMS in the previous month, including 18 per cent of mobile users who received commercial spam and 18 per cent who received SMS scams (see Figure 4.8).

Further analysis of demographic factors such as age, gender and income did not reveal significant differences and was limited by small sample sizes.

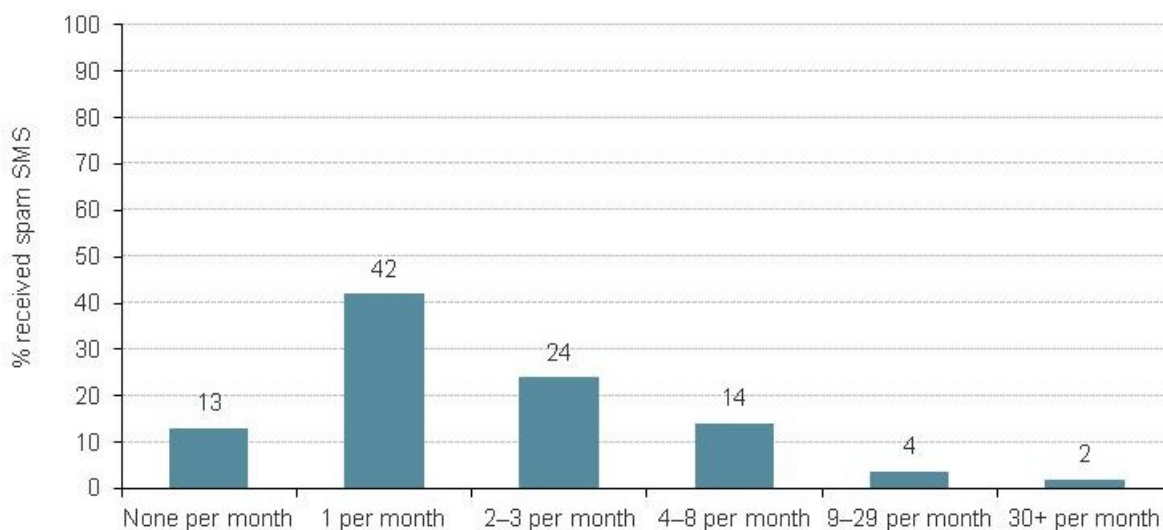
Figure 4.8 Mobile phone users who received spam SMS messages in last month



Base: Respondents who have a mobile phone for personal use (n=1,330).

In a typical month, 66 per cent of spam recipients received one to three spam SMS messages, 18 per cent received four to 29 and two per cent received 30 or more of these messages (see Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9 Number of spam SMS received in a typical month



Base: Respondents who received spam SMS on their personal mobile phone in the last month (n=354).

Focus group comments—Receiving spam SMS

Very few participants mentioned receiving spam SMS. Of those who received commercial spam, some indicated they may have given consent for contact.

Only from companies that you're on their sort of database for like shops ... (aged 18–34)

Nightclubs ... (aged 18–34)

I get a lot of credit card ones at the moment ... (aged 18–34)

I [received some] text messages lately, like random deals and stuff. (aged 18–34)

I got a text message saying I had won \$75,000. (aged 18–34)

I actually got a text message from the tax department, and I'm unsure how they got my mobile phone number, because they're saying do you want to ... if you haven't done your tax already, you can lodge it online and I can ... well, I've never done it online and I'm sure I've never given [them] my mobile phone number, so I replied 'stop' to that and two seconds later another one came through, if you need assistance, call your tax department and it's like I don't want these text messages, so that was a strange one, so that's probably spam (aged 35+).

Perceptions of spam SMS

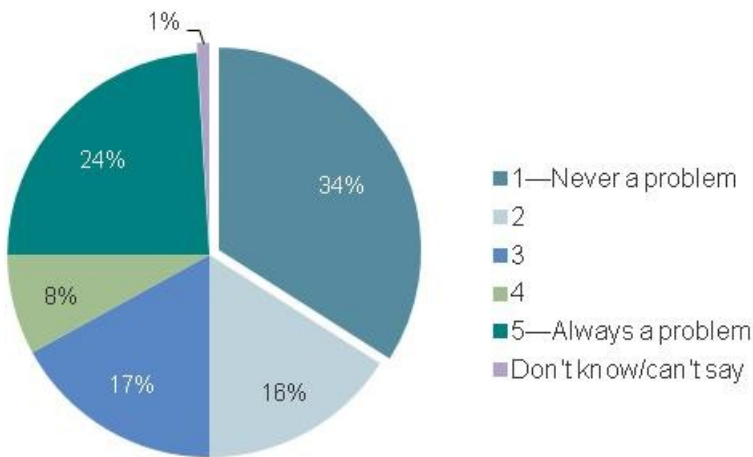
Respondents who received spam SMS messages were asked to rate them on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'never a problem' and 5 is 'always a problem'—and 50 per cent rated them 1 'never' or 2 'rarely' a problem (see Figure 4.10).

Fewer people received spam SMS messages (27 per cent of mobile users) than spam emails (73 per cent of people with a personal email address). However, a similar proportion of people who received spam SMS (33 per cent) and spam emails (36 per cent) found these messages to be always or often a problem.³

Demographic factors appear to have little impact on how mobile phone users perceived spam SMS.

³ Only the terms 'Never a problem' and 'Always a problem' were identified in the survey questionnaire. The descriptors 'often' (4 on the scale) and 'rarely' (2 on the scale) '... a problem' are included in this report for convenience.

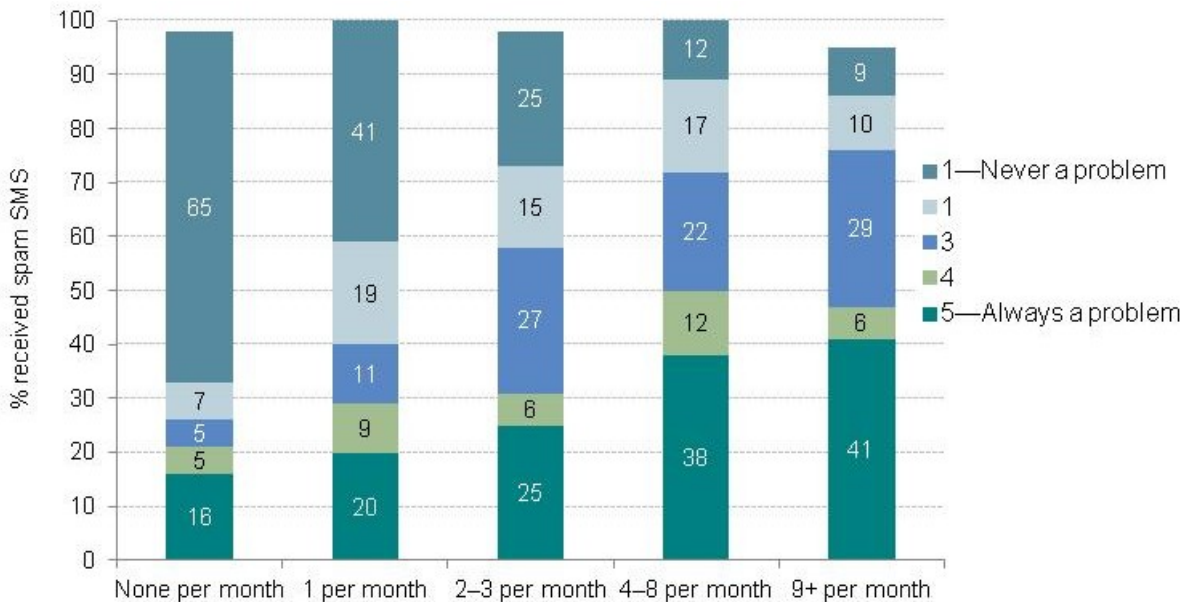
Figure 4.10 Extent to which spam SMS messages are perceived as a problem



Base: Respondents who received spam SMS on their mobile phone in the last month (n=354).

As with telemarketing calls and spam emails, there is a clear relationship between the number of spam SMS received and the extent to which messages were seen as problematic. Of people who received spam SMS more than nine times a month, 47 per cent considered them to be always or often a problem, while 29 per cent of those who received only one spam SMS a month held a similar view (see Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.11 Extent that spam SMS messages are perceived as a problem, by number received



Base: Respondents who received spam SMS on their mobile in the last month (n=354); received no spam SMS (n=46), one (n=150), two to three (n=83), four to eight (n=50), nine or more (n=21), don't know/can't say/refused (n=4).
 Caution: small sample sizes.

Why spam SMS is perceived as a problem

Table 4.2 lists the reasons people regard spam SMS as a problem, with 22 per cent of recipients of messages in the last month nominating them as a nuisance, annoying, inconvenient or a waste of time. Other reasons include them being unwanted or unsolicited (12 per cent), an invasion of privacy (10 per cent) and a scam (five per cent).

Those who did not find spam SMS a problem claimed they never or rarely receive them (24 per cent), they are easy to just delete (22 per cent) or they are not annoying/do not bother them (nine per cent).

Table 4.2 Why spam SMS is, or is not, perceived as a problem

Why spam SMS is a problem	People who received spam SMS and rated them (%)
Nuisance; annoying; inconvenient; wastes my time; interrupts my day; annoying having to delete them; think it's from someone I know but find it's not	22
I don't want or need them; I didn't ask for them; they're unsolicited; don't like them	12
They invade my privacy; concerned about my privacy; they have my number; I don't know how they got my number; I don't give out my number; concerned about the security of my personal details and contacts	10
They're trying to scam me/rip you off/take your money/rob you; they are worrying; concerned that I and some people and kids could get conned/tricked into it	5
They don't stop; can't stop them; don't know how to stop them; long process to stop them	3
Some of them charge if you open them; don't know if I'd be charged if I open them; I have been charged for opening them before	2
Received them at any hour of the day or night	2
Have to open them first to see what it is; you don't know what it is until you open them	1
I have been conned before	1
Why spam SMS is not a problem	People who received spam SMS and rated them (%)
Never or rarely receive them	24
I just delete them; can easily delete them	22
They're not annoying; they don't bother me; not a big deal; they don't worry me	9
Ignore them; don't take any notice of them; disregard them; I don't read them or reply	7
They're easily recognisable; I know it's a scam; I don't believe them; they're rubbish/ junk	6

Base: Respondents who received spam SMS in the last month and gave a rating of how problematic they are (n=349).

Focus group comments—Why spam SMS is a problem

Participants expressed the view that spam SMS are more intrusive than spam emails because they take their attention away from what they are doing.

It takes away your attention from what you're doing, like if there's an email, and ... unless you've got it set to notify, you can check them in your own time. I'll go to my email to check my emails, but a text will break your concentration if you're doing something ... it is intrusive. (aged 18–34)

I still look at it [spam SMS] as worse than, say, an email, because SMS actually takes your attention away, like if you're doing something or if you're expecting a call. (aged 18–34)

While one participant was frustrated at receiving email notifications whenever they received spam emails, another was annoyed that their phone kept alerting them whenever they received spam SMS.

I don't like the text messages. I don't mind the emails advertising things and I can look at a picture, but I don't like a text message because, like on an iPhone, it [the message notification] keeps repeating and repeating, so every time I come out of a meeting I have got these repeated [messages], like the message keeps coming up and I think that is annoying. (aged 18–34)

The view that receiving spam SMS is more personal than spam emails was commonly raised. Most participants were happy to give out their email address but not their mobile phone number.

Well, I will quite often give one of the lesser email addresses to anybody I'm not 100 per cent sure of. People I'm reasonably confident in I will give my real email address and then when I'm really sure, I'll give the phone number. (aged 35+)

I guess a phone number is more personal. (aged 35+)

Once you give someone your phone number, you usually don't change your phone number ... that's why you give your email address. (aged 35+)

I suppose you give your mobile to certain people, whereas [your email address], a lot of people can pick [it] up on internet packs ... (aged 18–34)

And if you sign up for something, you know, as soon as you enter that email, someone could pick it up, like you said, [you don't] give your mobile [phone number] too often, whereas email you probably put on the internet site more (aged 18–34)

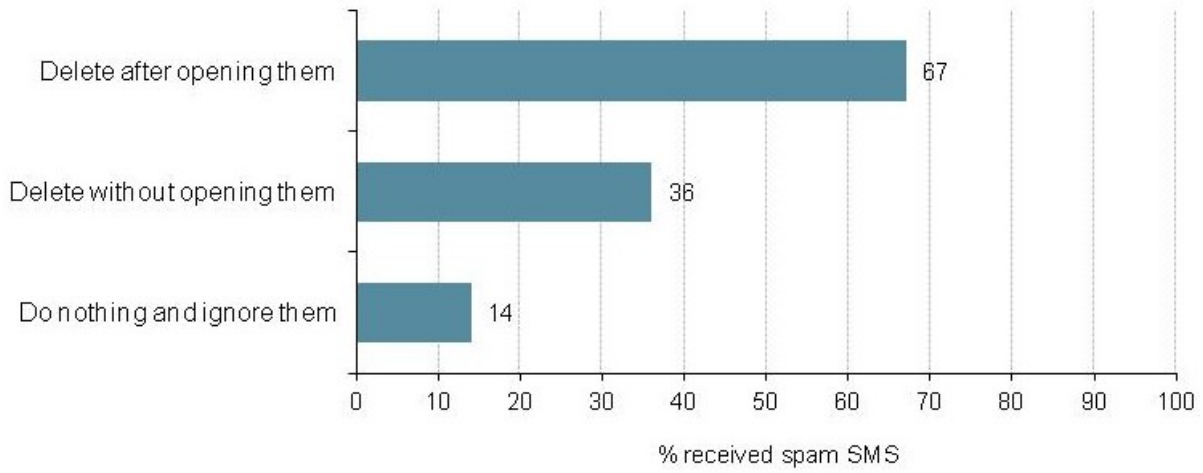
Actions taken in response to spam SMS

People who received spam SMS behaved similarly to those who received email spam, mostly by deleting the messages. However, in contrast to email spam recipients, who mostly deleted messages before opening, 67 per cent of spam SMS receivers deleted the messages after reading them. Thirty-six per cent said they deleted them without opening (see Figure 4.12).

This difference may be due in part to mobile phone message systems not often identifying the sender's name in new message notifications. For email spam, the sender's name is clearer and users can decide whether or not to open a message. It is also possible with emails to recognise spam from the subject line while there is no subject line in SMS messages.

The survey results also indicate that, as with spam email, more people deleted spam SMS without opening them when they received higher numbers of messages. Of those who received more than 10 spam SMS per month, 68 per cent deleted them without opening them, compared to 16 per cent of those who received fewer than one spam SMS per month.

Figure 4.12 Top three actions taken in response to spam SMS messages



Base: Respondents who received spam SMS on their mobile phone in the last month (n=354).

5. Online spam messages

Of the internet users in the survey, 77 per cent used online social media that includes social networking and messaging services. Unsolicited commercial electronic messages on these online social media are not covered under the Spam Act in all cases. However, due to the growing nature of these online networks and services, and the accompanying use of unsolicited e-messaging, the ACMA included them in the scope of the research to help it understand their impact on Australians.

No explicit definition of 'online spam' was provided to survey respondents. They were simply asked whether they had received spam-like or scam-type messages or marketing calls on the various online media services they used, and the extent to which they perceived them as a problem.

The focus group discussions suggest that there is little distinction made between the different types of unsolicited communications received through social media. While some participants referred to commercial messaging sent to their social media account as 'online spam', others included banner-type advertising in their comments (see quotes below). This should be kept in mind when reading the findings in this section.

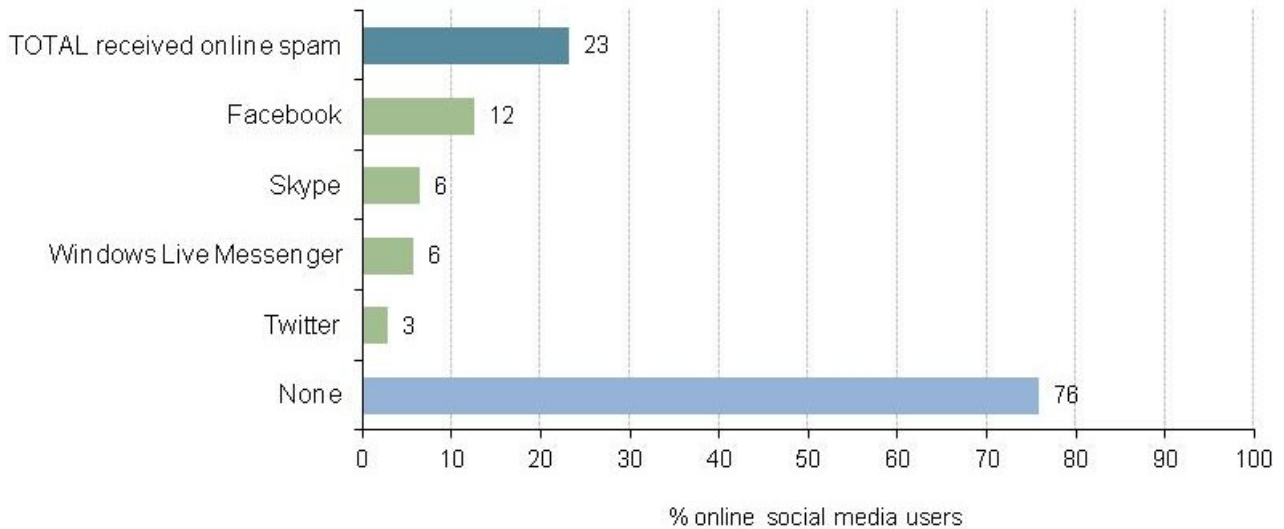
Online spam-like messages received

While 76 per cent of online social media users had not received online spam-like messages in the previous six months, 23 per cent had. This translates to 15 per cent of Australian adults who reported receiving online spam-like messages.

This is lower than the proportion of people who received spam emails (73 per cent of people with a personal email address) and those who received spam SMS messages (27 per cent of mobile users) in the previous month. For online spam, the use of the broader definition of spam-like messages and the longer reference period of six months further highlights the lower incidence of online spam received when this survey was conducted in July 2012.

Reflecting the relatively high use of Facebook (by 64 per cent of Australian adults in the survey), users of online social media mainly received spam on Facebook (12 per cent) compared to other social media services (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Social media users who received online spam-like messages in last six months, by service type



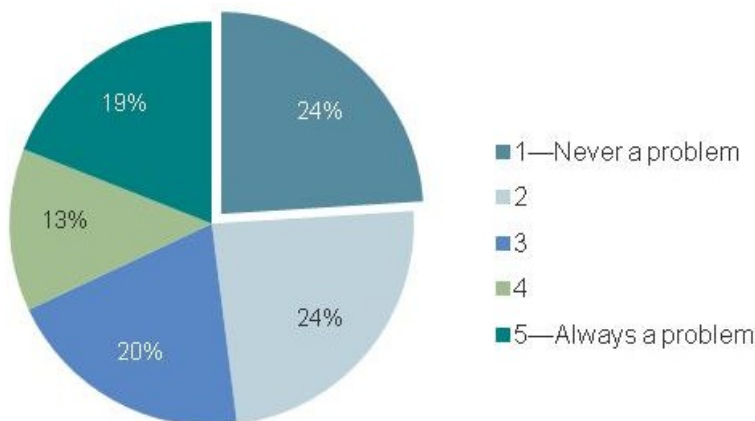
Base: Respondents who have an online social media account (n=947).

Perceptions of online spam-like messages

Survey respondents who received spam-like messages on their social media accounts were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how much of a problem they found them.

Just under half (48 per cent) gave ratings of 1 or 2—never or rarely a problem—to online spam (see Figure 5.2). The proportion who found online spam to be always or often a problem (32 per cent) is almost the same as those who reported SMS spam to be a problem (33 per cent).

Figure 5.2 Extent that online spam-like messages are perceived as a problem



Base: Respondents who received online spam via an online social media account (n=214).

Focus group comments—Social networking and online spam

Participants were asked what they regarded as online networking.

[Social networking includes] sharing images ... blogs or whatever. (aged 18–34)

It's networking, it's friends and companies. (aged 18–34)

Anything that's online where you are interacting with other people, so Twitter and any avenue of talking forums. (aged 18–34)

Many participants had a social media account but some decided not to because of privacy concerns.

Facebook scares me for some reason, just putting my life out there. I'm on Twitter and I follow a couple of hundred of journalists and news sites around the place. I just use it as a news tool, as a resource for keeping up to date with different things. It's very good in that regard because you can link to different articles or different news events that come through. For me, Facebook seems more intrusive. It's like inviting the world in. I might be completely wrong because I'm sure there is security. (aged 35+)

Most participants were aware of online spam.

I think those [are] scam ones ... that say [to] click 'Like' to get a JB Hi-Fi card and then you get 10,000 credit [10,000 dollar card] for doing it and there's no cards. (aged 18–34)

I found that somehow Facebook managed to wish one of my girlfriends the other day a happy birthday from me and I hadn't even logged in. This is the sort of stuff that annoys [me] about it. That is spam. (aged 35+)

Facebook advertising from various companies was mentioned as a type of online spam by most participants. One person also mentioned advertising they found in apps.

There are a few that are coming out, like Coles have done one. (aged 18–34)

A lot of it is undesirable, a lot of [it] is intrusive. I find a lot of [it] fairly offensive. There is a lot of stuff that they will try to flog on that right-hand side of the page that really goes against some things that I am really firmly against; gambling is one thing which I just don't approve of gambling. (aged 35+)

Apps actually have a lot of advertising which is annoying. (aged 18–34)

Participants also indicated that online spam received on social networks and social media services is less intrusive than telemarketing calls or SMS or email spam because the user's purpose for logging in is not so directly affected by spam. Usually, online spam can be easily ignored as it does not affect their online social activities.

It's just less intrusive, because you voluntarily log into your account to check it ... (aged 18–34)

You can choose to not look at your phone or scroll through it really quickly and do whatever you were planning to do. (aged 18–34)

Like the ones I get on Facebook and that, the majority of them are scam sort of ones, there are not really ... none of them have any credibility in my mind. (aged 18–34)

Appendix A— Survey design and methodology

The primary objective of the main quantitative survey phase was to obtain robust estimates of Australian consumers' experiences with unsolicited telemarketing calls and email and SMS spam.

A total of 1,500 computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) were conducted, with Australian residents aged 18 years and older.

The sample was designed as a quota sample to ensure that survey coverage was representative of the Australian population aged 18 years or older in terms of age, gender and geographic characteristics. The sample design also included the increasing proportion of people who do not have a fixed-line phone but do have access to a mobile phone. Mobile phone-only users were separately recruited from the Roy Morgan Single Source database.

The sample comprised two main subsamples:

- > respondents with a fixed-line home phone connected (n=1,207), sourced through Random Digit Dialling (RDD)
- > respondents with mobile phones only—that is, had a mobile phone and no fixed-line phone connected in the home (n=293), sourced through re-contact of respondents from the Roy Morgan Single Source database.

All interviews were conducted on weekday evenings (5.00 pm to 8.30 pm) or on weekends (11.00 am to 4.00 pm) from 17 to 30 July 2012.

Quotas were set for both samples to ensure that their demographic profile (age, sex and area) were representative of the population of Australians aged 18 years and over. This included both fixed-line phone households and mobile phone-only households, as determined by the latest Roy Morgan Single Source and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data.

Proportional weights were applied to the data to reflect the true distribution of these users. These were an interlocking weight of area by sex, area by age and area by region (metro/country), and a rim weight for the sample type (respondents with fixed landline and with mobile phones only). The weights used were calculated from the latest Roy Morgan Single Source data.

Final survey results can be generalised to the Australian population aged 18 and older with telecommunications access (home or mobile phone).

Statistical reliability of the quantitative results

The estimates derived for this study are based on information obtained from a sample survey and are subject to sampling variability. They may differ from results that would be obtained if all people in Australia were interviewed (a census) or if the survey was repeated with a different sample of respondents.

One measure of the likelihood of any difference is the standard error (SE), which shows the extent to which an estimate might vary by chance because only a sample of people were interviewed. An alternative way of showing this is the relative standard error (RSE), which is the SE as a percentage of the estimate.

The table below shows the SE for various sample sizes and response levels, and can be used to assess if there are statistically significant differences between results within the study. For example:

- > If the sample size was 1,500, a response set of 50 per cent has a SE of ± 2.5 per cent at a 95 per cent confidence level (that is, there are 95 chances in 100 that a repeat survey would produce a response set of between 52.5 and 47.5 per cent).
- > If there were 500 respondents to a question and 50 per cent gave a particular response, then the SE for that response is ± 4.4 per cent.

Where the RSE is between 30 and 49 per cent, results should be regarded as moderately reliable. Where the RSE is 50 per cent or higher, results should be regarded as indicative estimates only.

For results based on the total study sample of $n=1,500$, this sample size constrains the maximum sampling error to ± 2.5 per cent.

Table A.1 Estimated sampling error

Total sample and sub-sets										
Survey size estimate	2,400	2,250	2,000	1,750	1,500	1,250	1,000	750	500	300
Sample variance (+/-) 95% confidence intervals										
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
10%	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.7	1.9	2.1	2.6	3.4
20%	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.2	2.5	2.9	3.5	4.5
30%	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.3	2.5	2.8	3.3	4.0	5.2
40%	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.3	2.5	2.7	3.0	3.5	4.3	5.5
50%	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.5	2.8	3.1	3.6	4.4	5.6
60%	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.3	2.5	2.7	3.0	3.5	4.3	5.5
70%	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.3	2.5	2.8	3.3	4.0	5.2
80%	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.2	2.5	2.9	3.5	4.5
90%	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.7	1.9	2.1	2.6	3.4

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