

# A third of surveyed Australians say the internet is good for their sex lives

February 15 2022, by Nicole Shackleton, Anne-Maree Farrell, Jennifer Power

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Discussions about online sex often make it sound like the "dark side" of the internet.

We hear so much about risks and dangers such as "[revenge porn](#)", [dating scams](#), [porn addiction](#) and early exposure to sex.

But this isn't the whole story. Our new study looks at how Australians use technology in their sex lives and the many benefits of this.

## A regular part of life

We recently conducted [a survey of Australian adults](#) (ages 18 years or older). The study involved 445 people, with an average age of 42. More than half were women (58.5%), and 61% identified as heterosexual.

We found [digital media](#) was a common part of people's sex lives.

- 60% had watched porn online
- 35% had used dating apps
- 34% had sent sexual texts or naked selfies to another person.

## Better connections

People also reported how [digital technology](#) benefited their sex lives and relationships.

- 38% felt more emotionally connected to their partners
- 27% felt more sexually connected with their partners
- 31% said they found it sexually gratifying to share or receive sexual text messages with someone they met online.

Others reported using the internet to find information about relationships

or sexual health.

- 54% said information they found online had helped them feel more comfortable about sex
- 49% said the internet had enabled them to explore new or different sexual cultures

## Yes, there are risks

That being said, while reporting many benefits, participants were also aware of risks of sexual activity or communication online.

- 59% agreed sharing naked or explicit images or videos could cause them embarrassment
- 51% agreed online sexual engagement could cause them problems in the workplace
- 51% were worried their search history could be seen by others if they searched for pornography
- 24% were worried about providing personal contact details when shopping for sex products online.

## What is happening in Australia?

In 2021, federal parliament passed the [Online Safety Act](#), expanding the eSafety Commissioner's powers to combat cyberbullying and image-based abuse.

The commissioner can now demand that social media services, hosting services providers and individuals remove online material deemed to be [harmful, dangerous or abusive](#) within as little as 24 hours.

This is an important step in improving digital safety given the global, unregulated nature of the internet.

However, [there are serious concerns](#) these expanded powers will lead to restrictive acts, prohibiting consensual online sexual activity or information.

LGBTQIA+ and other sexual or kink communities face a censorship risk, while [sex workers' livelihoods are also at greater risk](#), particularly as so much sex work [shifted online](#) during COVID.

It could also make [safe sex education material](#) more difficult to access.

Current eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant [says](#) she will use the new powers to target child exploitation material and is not interested in policing the sexual interests of consenting adults. Nevertheless, the potential exists for such assurances to shift over time, or as a new appointee fills the position.

## Why does this matter?

Decades of research show sexual health education [is most effective](#) if it teaches sex should be pleasurable.

Messages that focus on abstinence or disease and problems [can undermine](#) people's [confidence](#) about pursuing healthy, consensual sexual relationships.

The same can be said for digital sexual literacy. Education about online safety [will be most effective](#) if discussions about risk occur in the context of sex in the digital world being a broadly [positive thing](#).

## How do we balance risk and pleasure?

Our findings add to the growing body of [research](#) that shows how the internet and digital technologies can benefit relationships and [sex lives](#).

These are places where people explore their sexuality, learn about sex, and engage with diverse communities. It can also be a space to facilitate conversations about consent, safety and [sexual health](#).

Managing digital risk should not be about sanitizing the internet but supporting people's choices.

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