

Study finds mainstream Christians and non-religious equally likely to use online pornography

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The use of web tracking panel data provides new insights into Germans' online pornography use. According to new research published in *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, German Catholics, Protestants, and the

religiously unaffiliated are as likely to use online pornography as each other. By comparison, members of minority religions in Germany, such as Muslims or Orthodox Christians, are less likely to use online pornography.

"Prior studies have shown that religiosity can be a strong predictor of pornography usage," said Dr. Pascal Siegers of GESIS—Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. "We wanted to re-investigate these questions using web tracking data that is less likely to be affected by social desirability."

Von Andrian-Werburg, Siegers, and Breuer combined data from a large-scale German online web tracking panel with [survey data](#) collected from the panelists. Their results generally replicate previous findings from survey-based research from Germany and other countries.

However, the study has also generated some novel insights, such as the identified difference in the role of religion in online pornography use between members of the religious majorities and unaffiliated in Germany and members of minority religions.

The German results differ from research findings in other countries. "In Germany, being Protestant or Catholic doesn't significantly reduce the likelihood of a person's online pornography use. This is different from results from other countries, such as the United States," said Dr. Johannes Breuer, another research team member.

"We suspect this is because German Christians tend to be more liberal than, for example, American evangelicals." "One thing to note is that, for reasons of data privacy, participants in the web tracking panel can pause the tracking. Hence, it may also be that conservative American Christians who participate in web tracking studies are more likely to mute web tracking when they visit a pornographic website, making it

look like they don't visit such sites," he added.

People's use of pornography and which characteristics predict the use have been well-researched in social science. Prior research used surveys to collect their data. However, surveys are based on self-reporting, and that can have limitations. People may underreport their pornography use because they can't remember accurately how many times they've used it, or people may not provide an accurate number because they feel embarrassed.

"With people participating in web tracking panels, we have a new way to measure online pornography use besides someone's self-report," said Siegers. "Previous research by Morichetta and colleagues found that, on average, people in the panel spent 37 minutes a week using online [pornography](#), but they reported an average of 24 minutes. It is definitely the case that web-tracked activity gives us a more accurate picture of what people do online."

The work is [published](#) in the journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

More information: Maximilian T. P. von Andrian-Werburg et al, A Re-evaluation of Online Pornography Use in Germany: A Combination of Web Tracking and Survey Data Analysis, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s10508-023-02666-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-023-02666-8)

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