eSafetyresearch

Covid-19

impact on Australian adults'
online activities and attitudes
June 2020

Contents

eSafety research program

Under Section 15 of the Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015 the eSafety Commissioner (eSafety):

- supports, encourages, conducts, and evaluates research about online safety for Australians

- collects, analyses, interprets and disseminates information about online safety

- publishes reports and papers relating to online safety for Australians.

The research program is underpinned by four key themes including:

1. tracking trends

2. supporting the development of eSafety resources and programs

3. inter-agency and international co-operation

4. program and resource evaluation.

This research fits under themes 1 and 2.

Relevant content provided by eSafety includes: esafety.gov.au/about-us/research

For any enquiries relating to the eSafety research program, please contact research@esafety.gov.au

Overview

Australia's COVID-19 social distancing and isolation measures have led to significant changes in the way we live, triggering dramatic lifestyle changes for families and individuals across the country. One of the most notable changes is our increased dependence on the internet to maintain social and economic connections. This research report, based on a survey of 1,229 adults, provides a unique snapshot of the impact COVID-19 restrictions have had on Australians' online behaviours and attitudes. It also highlights some of the challenges relating to online safety and digital competency we face in becoming more dependent on online interactions. Key highlights relating to online experiences during lockdown include:

- Australians using the internet a lot more for one or more tasks increased by 56 per cent.

- Nearly four in 10 Australians had a negative experience online during the first few months of the pandemic including receiving unwanted messages or contact (26%), being sent unwanted inappropriate content (12%) and having things said online to provoke an argument (8%).

- Despite these negative experiences, Australians viewed the internet as important or essential during the COVID-19 lockdown, particularly for paying bills and banking (87%), accessing news and information (82%), staying in touch with family and friends (80%), work (75%), entertainment (71%), staying fit and healthy (44%), and buying groceries (39%).

Key findings

This research shows that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on Australians' online activity — and what people see as essential online services.

Key findings include:

- The overwhelming majority of adults in Australia see the internet as a 'good thing' personally (86%), for their household in general (85%) and for Australian society (79%).

- There has been a significant increase in online activity driven by use of the internet to:

  - stay up-to-date with news and health information (30% report having done this 'a lot more')

  - work — 27%

  - to watch videos — 27%

  - to access social media for entertainment — 25%

  - make video calls with family and friends — 23%.

- The internet is seen as essential to many day-to-day activities including:

  - work (58% identify the internet as being essential to this)

  - paying bills and banking — 56%

  - communicating and social interactions with family and friends — 43%

  - accessing news and information — 43%

  - entertainment — 35%.

- Post COVID-19 restrictions, many adults intend to either maintain or increase their online activities including:

  - paying bills and banking (78% aiming to maintain or increase this activity)

  - communicating and social interaction with family and friends — 69%

  - accessing news and information — 68%

  - work — 62%

  - entertainment — 62%.

- Overall, adults who are online have varying levels of digital confidence with 33% being very confident, 56% feel somewhat confident and 8% not confident at all that they have the skills and access to information to feel safe online.

- Adult digital confidence levels differ depending on the issue they experience. For example:

  - 28% of online adults strongly agree and 48% somewhat agree that they are '… more confident using the internet to do day-to-day things'

- 27% strongly agree and 38% somewhat agree that they '… know how to deal with being bullied or harassed online'

- 23% strongly agree and 55% somewhat agree that they '… know how to protect their privacy and security online'

- 11% strongly agree and 34% somewhat agree that they '… don't know what sources of online news and information to trust'

- 9% strongly agree and 32% somewhat agree that they '… feel overloaded with information/having to stay up-to-date.'

- There were differences in digital confidence found between genders and age. Males (38%) are more likely to be very confident than females (28%) and those aged 18–24 feel the most confident in their abilities (44%).

- As they consider their online safety, the adults surveyed had the following three training and information needs, which were consistent, regardless of age and gender:

  - 41% want information on how to protect themselves from viruses or hacking

  - 35% want information on privacy and safety features on their electronic devices

  - 31% want information on using filters to block harmful or offensive content.

- Approximately 38% of adults had at least one negative online experience during COVID-19 with experiences ranging from receiving repeated unwanted messages or contact (26%), being sent unwanted inappropriate content such as pornography or violent content (12%), having things said online to provoke or start an argument (8%) and being electronically tracked without consent (6%).

- Those aged 25 – 34 are the most confident in their understanding of negative online experiences and feel more confident using the internet to do day to day activities (43% strongly agree). Those aged 50 and over were less confident (27% strongly agree).

- When asked about what they want from the internet during times of crisis or national emergency, 89% of adults identified specific needs:

  - 32% want information that is up-to-date, accurate and reliable, in addition to an official web page and advice and alerts

  - 24% want reliable internet services covering issues such as dropouts and consistency of speed

  - 15% cited faster internet speeds

  - 8% mentioned a safer and secure internet.

- Having children in the home during COVID-19 restrictions impacted adult online behaviours and attitudes. Adults with children were twice as likely to undertake an activity online 'a lot more' during this period than adults without children. They were also more likely to see the internet as essential to undertaking daily activities than adults without children.

Findings

Perception of the internet during COVID-19 restrictions

Regardless of age or gender, the overwhelmingly majority of adult Australians saw the internet as a 'good thing' during the COVID-19 restrictions. This applies both for themselves, their household and Australia in general, which reflects the importance people place on staying connected.

Table 1: Perception of the internet as a good influence during COVID-19 restrictions

	Total	Gender		Age				
		Male	**Female**	**18 – 24**	**25 – 34**	**35 – 49**	**50 – 64**	**65+**
A good thing for me personally	86%	86%	86%	85%	89%	83%	87%	87%
A good thing for my household in general	85%	83%	86%	80%	86%	85%	86%	84%
A good thing for society	79%	76%	81%	74%	80%	79%	79%	79%
Base: internet users 18 years+	1,229	613	616	154	225	319	327	204

Impact of COVID-19 restrictions on internet use

More than half of adults went online a lot more for at least one online activity. While adults use the internet for a number of reasons, the top five areas in which their online activity significantly increased during this period are:

- keeping up to date on news and health information — 30% reported having done this a lot more

- streaming video content — 27%

- work — 27%

- using social media — 25%

- making video calls with family and friends — 23%.

This is generally consistent for males and females and all age groups. Internet users aged 18 – 34 reported the highest increase in these activities.

Table 2: Activities adults undertook 'a lot more' during COVID-19 restrictions

Did 'a lot more'	Total	Gender		Age				
		Male	Female	18 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 49	50 – 64	65+
Stay up to date with news and health information	30%	29%	32%	38%	45%	32%	23%	20%
Watch videos such as movies/TV shows/YouTube	27%	29%	24%	56%	51%	28%	8%	7%
Work*	27%	27%	26%	34%	35%	29%	10%	9%
Use social media	25%	25%	24%	25%	50%	23%	14%	7%
Make video calls with family and friends	23%	23%	22%	44%	44%	19%	8%	12%
School/course work	16%	17%	15%	44%	31%	16%	2%	1%
Listen to music/podcasts	14%	16%	12%	36%	28%	11%	4%	2%
Have social get-togethers (virtual parties/catch-ups/drinks etc.)	12%	12%	12%	23%	26%	10%	5%	5%
Play games	13%	18%	9%	33%	24%	11%	5%	4%
Bill payments/banking	12%	13%	11%	16%	26%	16%	4%	2%
Buy groceries or shop	10%	10%	11%	14%	17%	11%	7%	5%
Participate in exercise groups	7%	6%	9%	16%	12%	8%	4%	2%

Note: top results for each activity are highlighted in green. * Base: those who are in paid employment.

Perception of the internet as an essential service during COVID-19

Australians are increasingly reliant on the internet for day-to-day activities and consider it to be essential for a broad range of activities. For those who are currently employed, the ability to work online was considered essential. Paying bills or banking is next on the list followed by communication and social interaction. Some gender differences were evident — a greater proportion of females considered the internet to be essential for most daily activities except for work, news and information and entertainment where there was no significant difference between genders.

Table 3: Adult perceptions of the internet as either essential or important to daily activities (by gender)

	Total		Males		Females	
	Essential	Important but not essential	Essential	Important but not essential	Essential	Important but not essential
For work*	58%	17%	59%	18%	58%	16%
To pay bills or do banking	56%	31%	51%	36%	61%	24%
For communication and social interactions with family/friends	43%	37%	43%	37%	50%	35%
For news and information	43%	39%	42%	41%	44%	38%
For entertainment (video, music, games etc.)	35%	36%	35%	36%	36%	35%
For schoolwork/course work	28%	8%	26%	9%	29%	6%
To buy groceries and food	21%	18%	18%	20%	24%	16%
To remain active and healthy	18%	26%	14%	23%	21%	29%

Note: top results for each activity are highlighted in green. * Base: those who are in paid employment.

Age plays a large part in perceptions of importance of the internet for daily activities. Those aged under 35 years were more likely to view online activities essential for day-to-day tasks while those aged 35 – 50 were more likely to view them as important but not essential. A lower proportion of Australians aged 50+ considered the internet to be essential or important to undertaking daily activities.

Table 4: Adult perceptions of the internet as either essential or important to daily activities (by age)

Age	18 – 24		25 – 34		35 – 49		50 – 64		65+	
	Essential	Important but not essential	Essential	Important but not essential	Essential	Important but not essential	Essential	Important but not essential	Essential	Important but not essential
Pay bills or do banking	62%	24%	59%	33%	56%	34%	52%	30%	53%	33%
For work*	61%	19%	73%	17%	60%	18%	40%	15%	35%	17%
Communication and social interactions with family and friends	55%	38%	62%	28%	44%	38%	31%	41%	32%	41%
News and information	49%	41%	59%	33%	46%	37%	34%	46%	30%	39%
Entertainment (video, music, games etc.)	59%	29%	59%	33%	39%	40%	19%	42%	11%	28%
School work/course work	57%	15%	53%	10%	35%	9%	6%	6%	3%	2%
Buying groceries and food	24%	16%	31%	24%	23%	20%	13%	19%	16%	11%
Remain active and healthy	28%	27%	29%	33%	18%	26%	11%	19%	9%	27%

Note: top results for each activity are highlighted in green. * Base: those who are in paid employment.

Online intentions post COVID-19 restrictions

With increased reliance on the internet during COVID-19, many Australians intend to continue to perform daily activities online at current or increased levels. A majority plan to use the internet to pay bills or do banking online (78%), communicate or socialise with family and friends (69%), seek news and information (68%) and for entertainment (62%) once restrictions are over. These intentions are consistent across genders. Overall, those aged 25 – 34 are consistently more likely to maintain or increase their internet activity post Covid-19 restrictions.

Table 5: Adult intentions for internet use post COVID-19 restrictions (by gender and age)
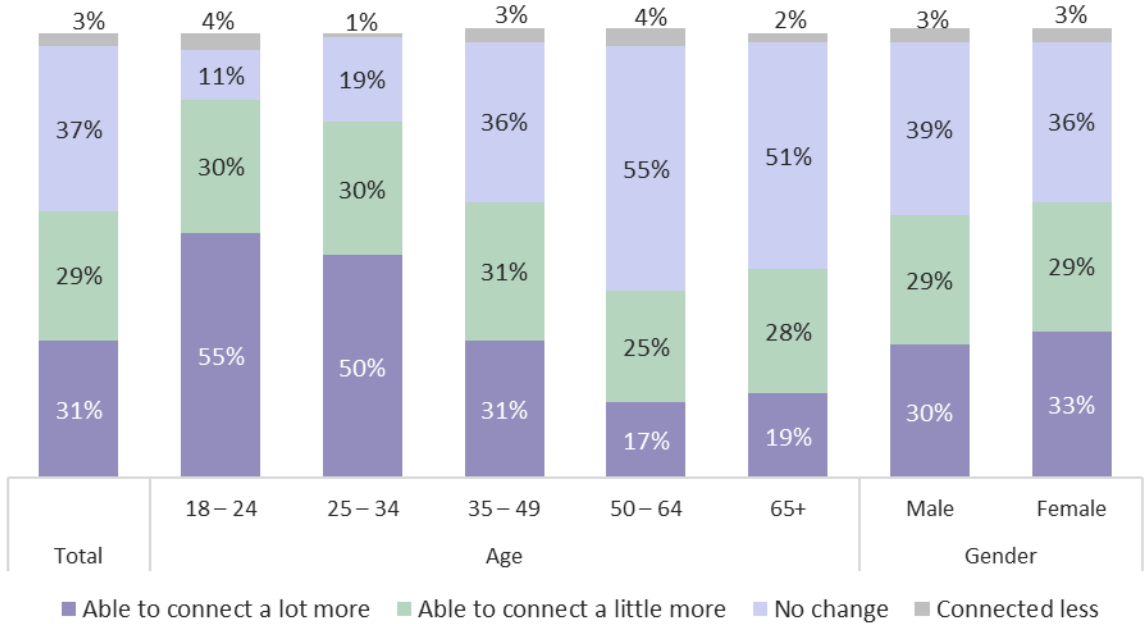
	Total	Gender		Age				
		Male	**Female**	**18 – 24**	**25 – 34**	**35 – 49**	**50 – 64**	**65+**
Pay bills or do banking	78%	78%	79%	73%	82%	80%	75%	80%
Communication and social interactions with family and friends	69%	68%	69%	69%	75%	65%	68%	69%
News/information	68%	71%	65%	53%	73%	67%	68%	72%
Work*	62%	61%	62%	56%	64%	66%	57%	62%
Entertainment (video, music, games etc.)	62%	67%	58%	64%	71%	65%	58%	53%
Remain active and healthy	53%	51%	55%	48%	62%	55%	45%	54%
Buy groceries/food	50%	48%	51%	37%	62%	56%	45%	43%
School work/course work	24%	25%	23%	53%	43%	27%	9%	3%

Note: top results for each activity are highlighted in green. * Base: those in paid employment.

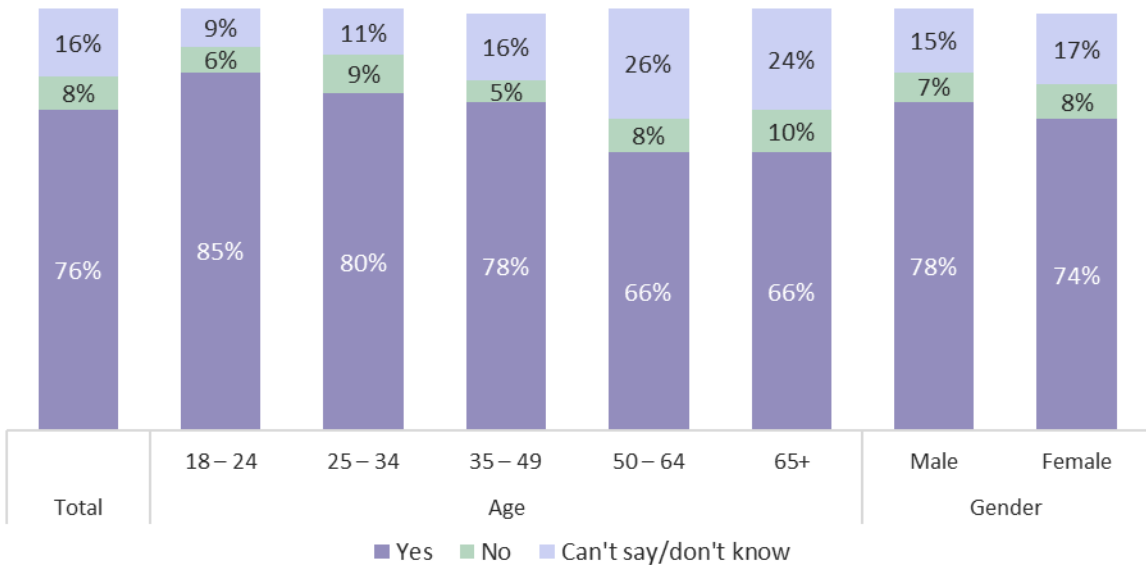## Staying connected with family and friends

The internet has been particularly important in enabling family and friends to connect and communicate during the COVID-19 restrictions. Two thirds (66%) of adult Australians were able to connect 'a lot more' or 'a little more' during this period, with the younger age groups connecting more than their older counterparts.

Figure 1: Extent to which adults have used the internet to connect with family/friends during COVID-19 restrictions

Total: 3%, 37%, 29%, 31%
18–24: 4%, 11%, 30%, 55%
25–34: 1%, 19%, 30%, 50%
35–49: 3%, 36%, 31%, 31%
50–64: 4%, 55%, 25%, 17%
65+: 2%, 51%, 28%, 19%
Male: 3%, 39%, 29%, 30%
Female: 3%, 36%, 29%, 33%

Age — Gender

■ Able to connect a lot more   ■ Able to connect a little more   ■ No change   ■ Connected less

Of the adults making use of video calls over the internet with family and friends during the restrictions, a majority plan to continue to stay in touch using the technology. Australians aged under 25 are most likely to continue using video calls. This decreases with age though still remains above 60%.

Figure 2: Intention to continue using video calls post COVID-19 restrictions

Total: 16%, 8%, 76%
18–24: 9%, 6%, 85%
25–34: 11%, 9%, 80%
35–49: 16%, 5%, 78%
50–64: 26%, 8%, 66%
65+: 24%, 10%, 66%
Male: 15%, 7%, 78%
Female: 17%, 8%, 74%

Age — Gender

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Can't say/don't know

Digital confidence, capabilities and training needs

This research shows that one third of Australians are very confident that they have the skills/information needed to feel safe online. One third (33%) are very confident and more than half (56%) feel somewhat confident. Males are more likely to be very confident (38%) than females (28%). Confidence also decreases with age — those aged 18 – 34 years are the most confident in their abilities.

Table 6: Levels of confidence in skills/access to information to feel safe online

	Total	Gender		Age				
		Male	**Female**	**18 – 24**	**25 – 34**	**35 – 49**	**50 – 64**	**65+**
Very confident	33%	38%	28%	44%	42%	31%	28%	26%
Somewhat confident	56%	53%	60%	47%	49%	59%	58%	64%
Not confident	8%	6%	9%	6%	7%	6%	11%	8%
Can't say	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%	4%	4%	3%

Note: top results that are over 5% for each activity are highlighted in green.

The top responses about skills and abilities showed that adult Australians:

- have good understanding of the negative things that can happen online — 34% strongly agree and 55% somewhat agree

- know how to protect privacy and security online — 23% strongly agree and 55% somewhat agree

- feel more confident using the internet to do day to day things — 28% strongly agree and 48% somewhat agree

- have access to the necessary training and help needs to do day-to-day things online — 19% strongly agree and 47% agree.

While adults were generally confident with their digital skills and abilities, they also had some concerns, including:

- not knowing what sources of online news and information to trust — 11% strongly agree and 33% somewhat agree

- feeling overloaded with information and having to stay up-to-date — 9% strongly agree and 32% somewhat agree

- that learning new skills and ways to do things online was a big challenge — 11% strongly agree and 29% somewhat agree.

Figure 3: Perception of digital confidence and capabilities (by area of skill)
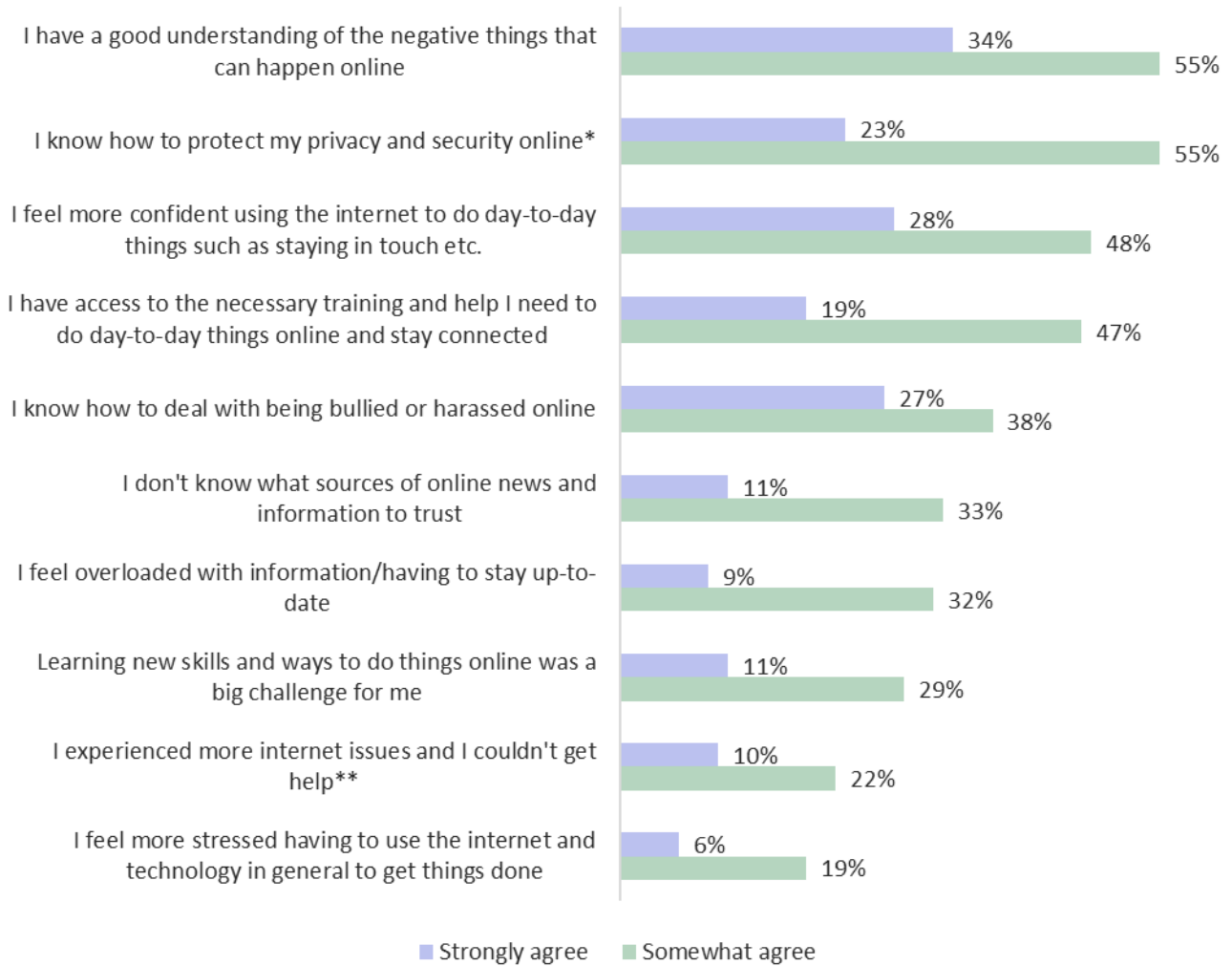
* For example, location settings, restricting the sharing of certain information. **Internet faults or dropouts, slower speed usual/speed not fast enough.

Table 7: Perception of digital confidence and capabilities (by gender)

	Males		Females	
	Strongly agree	**Somewhat agree**	**Strongly agree**	**Somewhat agree**
I have a good understanding of the negative things that can happen online	35%	55%	34%	55%
I feel more confident using the internet to do day-to-day things such as staying in touch etc.	27%	47%	29%	48%
I know how to deal with being bullied or harassed online	29%	41%	25%	36%
I know how to protect my privacy and security online*	25%	54%	20%	56%
I have access to the necessary training and help I need to do day-to-day things online and stay connected	18%	51%	20%	43%
Learning new skills and ways to do things online was a big challenge for me	12%	27%	10%	30%
I don't know what sources of online news and information to trust	11%	34%	10%	32%
I experienced more internet issues and I couldn't get help**	12%	22%	9%	21%
I feel overloaded with information/having to stay up to date	8%	34%	9%	31%
I feel more stressed having to use the internet and technology in general to get things done	8%	19%	5%	19%

Note: top results for each activity are highlighted in green. * For example, location settings, restricting the sharing of certain information. **Internet faults or dropouts, slower speed usual/speed not fast enough.

The relationship between age and digital confidence is clear. Those aged 25 – 34 were the most confident in their understanding of the negative things that can happen online (43% strongly agree) and felt more confident using the internet to do day-to-day activities (45% strongly agree), while those aged 50 and over were less confident in their understanding and use (27% strongly agree and 17-19% respectively).

However, Australians aged under 35 also reported issues they face online. A higher proportion of those aged 24 – 35 felt challenged learning new skills and ways to do things (14% strongly agree, 39% somewhat agree) and experienced more internet issues where they couldn't get help (22% strongly agree, 34% somewhat agree). For those aged 18 – 24, a higher proportion did not know what sources of online news and information to trust (16% strongly agree and 44% somewhat agree).

Table 8: Perception of digital confidence and capabilities (by age)

	18 − 24		25 − 34		35 − 49		50 − 64		65+	
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree
I have a good understanding of the negative things that can happen online	38%	46%	43%	48%	38%	51%	27%	61%	27%	64%
I feel more confident using the internet to do day-to-day things such as staying in touch etc.	38%	44%	45%	45%	28%	47%	17%	50%	19%	50%
I know how to deal with being bullied or harassed online	37%	42%	39%	40%	23%	42%	21%	37%	21%	31%
I know how to protect my privacy and security online*	32%	49%	33%	50%	24%	56%	16%	54%	15%	64%
I have access to the necessary training and help I need to do day-to-day things online and stay connected	33%	47%	21%	55%	21%	49%	12%	45%	15%	40%
Learning new skills and ways to do things online was a big challenge for me	20%	27%	14%	39%	8%	32%	8%	21%	10%	24%
I don't know what sources of online news and information to trust	16%	44%	13%	34%	12%	27%	8%	32%	7%	35%
I experienced more internet issues and I couldn't get help**	22%	34%	15%	32%	10%	23%	6%	15%	6%	10%
I feel over-loaded with information/having to stay up to date	13%	36%	11%	47%	11%	32%	5%	28%	5%	22%
I feel more stressed having to use the internet/technology in general to get things done	15%	27%	9%	26%	5%	20%	2%	16%	5%	11%

Note: top results for each activity are highlighted in green for somewhat agree. **Internet faults or dropouts, slower speed usual/speed not fast enough.

Those aged under 35 sought help more than usual from family and friends (average 21%) or sought online information (approximately 26%), compared to those aged 50 and over (under 10%). The younger group was also more likely to do a course during COVID-19 to meet their needs (approximately 12%) compared to those aged 50 and over (less than 5%).

The most common information and training need identified is protection form viruses or hacking (41%), followed by privacy and safety features on electronic devices (35%). On average, adults aged 18 - 34 are more likely to identify a range of training needs than other age groups.

Table 9: Online training during COVID-19 restrictions and identified information/training needs

	Total	Gender		Age				
		Male	**Female**	**18 – 24**	**25 – 34**	**35 – 49**	**50 – 64**	**65+**
Help or training sought — more than usual during COVID-19 restrictions								
Sought help from family and friends	14%	13%	15%	22%	19%	13%	10%	11%
Sought information online	13%	16%	11%	25%	27%	14%	5%	2%
Did a course	5%	6%	4%	11%	13%	3%	2%	1%
Did something else	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Identified information and training needs during COVID-19 restrictions								
Protection from viruses or hacking	41%	40%	43%	56%	51%	36%	36%	37%
Privacy and safety features on electronic devices	35%	35%	35%	34%	46%	36%	30%	32%
The use of filters to block harmful or offensive content	31%	30%	31%	29%	34%	28%	25%	37%
Dealing with unwanted online contact	28%	28%	27%	39%	29%	26%	22%	29%
Preventing or responding to a negative online incident such as bullying or hate speech	18%	17%	19%	29%	25%	17%	10%	15%
How to use apps* and digital devices (e.g. mobile phone or laptop)	17%	16%	18%	16%	25%	13%	13%	19%
How to use online services such as banking or shopping	13%	14%	11%	18%	19%	14%	7%	9%

Note: top results for each activity are highlighted in green. *Including social media, video conferencing etc.

Negative online experiences during restrictions

In this research, nearly 4 in 10 adults (38%) reported having a negative online experience during the COVID-19 restrictions. The top three experiences noted were repeat unwanted contact (26%), being sent unwanted inappropriate content (12%) and attempts to provoke an argument (8%). This was consistent for both males and females. Across the age groups, those aged under 35 reported the highest level of these incidences.

Table 10: Negative online experiences during COVID-19 restrictions

	Total	Gender		Age				
		Male	Female	18 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 49	50 – 64	65+
Repeated unwanted messages or contact	26%	28%	25%	34%	37%	19%	22%	27%
Sent unwanted inappropriate content*	12%	15%	8%	18%	18%	10%	8%	7%
Things said online to provoke and start an argument	8%	10%	6%	16%	14%	8%	5%	2%
Device infected with a virus or malware	7%	6%	7%	15%	11%	5%	3%	3%
Electronically tracked without my consent	6%	7%	6%	8%	10%	8%	4%	3%
Things said to offend me because of race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability etc.	6%	8%	4%	13%	10%	7%	2%	0%
Money stolen/fraud	5%	6%	4%	6%	8%	5%	5%	2%
Called offensive names online	5%	6%	5%	15%	11%	4%	2%	1%
Accounts accessed without consent	5%	6%	5%	10%	8%	5%	4%	3%
Personal information/photos/videos used in a way I did not like**	4%	6%	3%	9%	7%	6%	1%	1%
Threats online of real-life harm or violence	3%	4%	2%	8%	6%	4%	1%	0%
Video call hacked by someone I didn't know	3%	3%	3%	6%	5%	5%	1%	0%
Private photos/videos*** shared of me without consent	3%	3%	3%	5%	6%	3%	1%	0%
At least one experience	38%	43%	33%	56%	47%	34%	30%	33%

Notes: top results for each activity are highlighted in green. *For example, pornography or violent content. **Such as shared identity online. ***Nude, semi-nude, sexual.

Internet needs during times of crisis or national emergency

Adults, regardless of age and gender, reported expecting a range of things from the internet during times of crisis or national emergency (such as COVID-19). However, two needs stand out from the survey data. These are, the need for information (32% — including up-to-date, accurate and reliable information, a dedicated official web page, advice and alerts) and reliability of internet service (24%).

Table 11: What adult Australians want/expect from the internet during times of crisis/national emergency

	Total	Gender		Age				
		Male	**Female**	**18 – 24**	**25 – 34**	**35 – 49**	**50 – 64**	**65+**
Information (up-to-date, accurate and reliable, dedicated official web page, advice, alerts etc.)	32%	32%	31%	33%	30%	31%	24%	35%
Reliability of service (including no dropouts, consistency of services)	24%	24%	24%	25%	12%	20%	31%	26%
Faster/consistent internet speed	15%	15%	15%	15%	23%	18%	18%	13%
Nothing	11%	11%	10%	11%	7%	8%	11%	11%
Safer internet/safety/security	8%	8%	9%	8%	10%	9%	10%	7%
Other	4%	4%	6%	3%	9%	5%	4%	3%
Don't know	4%	4%	3%	5%	5%	5%	5%	4%
Data plans (more data, cheaper plans, free data)	4%	4%	5%	3%	7%	6%	5%	3%
Solutions to communicate easily with friends and family	3%	3%	2%	4%	4%	4%	1%	3%
More entertainment	3%	3%	3%	3%	5%	4%	4%	1%
Help and support (technology, medical/health)	2%	2%	3%	2%	3%	4%	2%	2%
Work related (access to work server, data etc.)	3%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%	3%

Notes: top results that are over 5% for each activity are highlighted in green.

COVID-19 impact on online behaviours — adults with children

The presence of children in households during COVID-19 restrictions significantly impacted adults' online behaviours and attitudes. Adults with children were often twice as likely to undertake an activity online 'a lot more' during this period than adults without children (Figure 4). This could be because many of the activities performed online are done to support children while at home or to connect them to entertainment, or family and friends. This is strengthened by data in Figure

5 which shows that 49 – 69% of adults with children identify the internet as essential across daily activities compared to 16 – 39% of adults without children. Though comparatively small, a higher proportion of adults with children were more stressed from having to use the internet than those without children, strongly agreeing with the statements that:

- 'I feel overloaded with information with having to stay up-to-date all the time' (14% compared to 6%)
- 'I feel more stressed having to use the internet and technology in general to get things done' (12% compared to 4%).

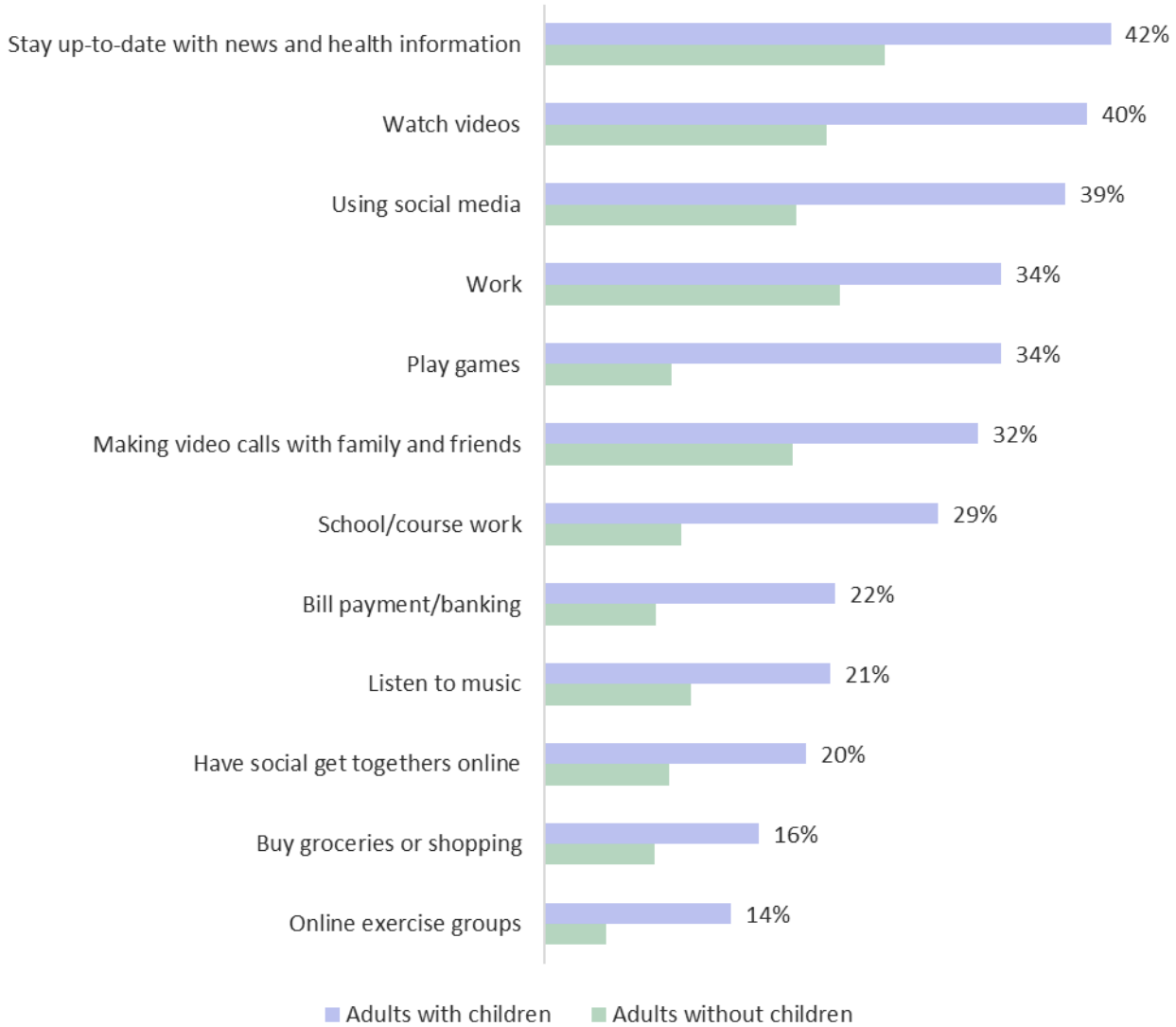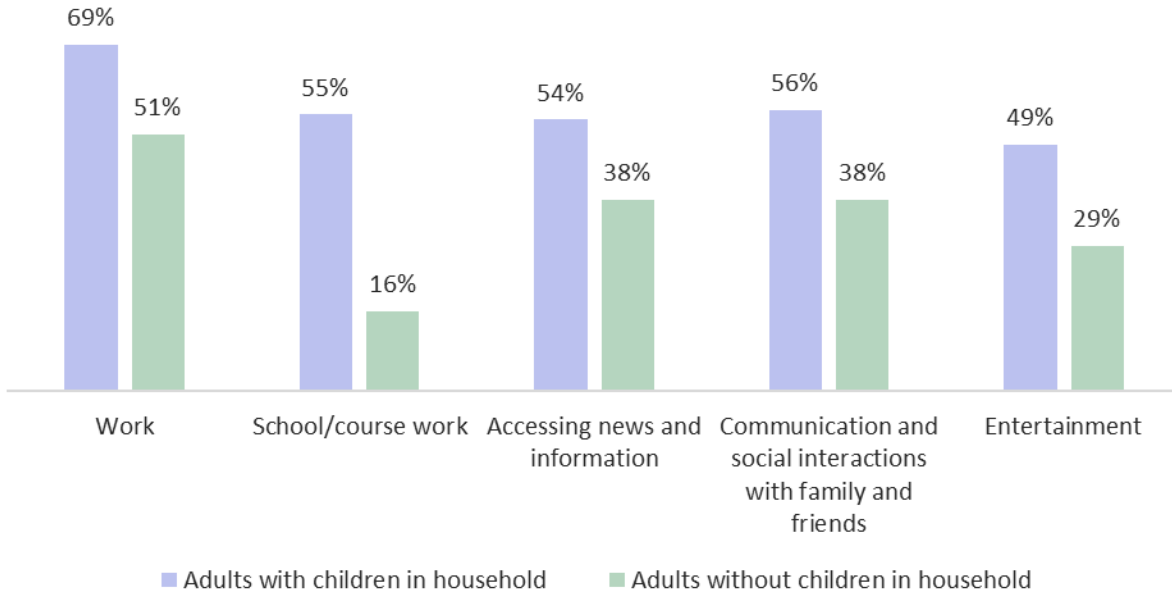**Figure 4: Adults doing activities 'a lot more' during COVID-19 restrictions (by child status)**

Activity	Adults with children
Stay up-to-date with news and health information	42%
Watch videos	40%
Using social media	39%
Work	34%
Play games	34%
Making video calls with family and friends	32%
School/course work	29%
Bill payment/banking	22%
Listen to music	21%
Have social get togethers online	20%
Buy groceries or shopping	16%
Online exercise groups	14%

■ Adults with children　　■ Adults without children

Figure 5: Adults who see the internet as essential for day-to-day activities (by child status)

Legend: ■ Adults with children in household ■ Adults without children in household

Data shown in chart:
- Work: 69% / 51%
- School/course work: 55% / 16%
- Accessing news and information: 54% / 38%
- Communication and social interactions with family and friends: 56% / 38%
- Entertainment: 49% / 29%

Conclusion

For Australian adults, even those who have had negative online experiences, the internet has been essential and overall positive during the COVID-19 restrictions. This is true both personally and at a broader societal level. This further demonstrates the vital role the internet plays in keeping people connected to critical information and services now and into the future. This period of enforced social and economic isolation has seen a sustained increase in online activities with many adults intending to either maintain or increase their online engagement post the restrictions. It is also encouraging to see older online Australians embrace the internet during this period, seeing the value it adds to their lives.

While increased dependency on the internet has presented a range of digital confidence and capability challenges, the overall benefits have seemingly outweighed these challenges. Most interesting, a higher proportion of younger adults have identified challenges in increasing their online engagement. This is likely a consequence of the sheer amount of activity they already undertake online and the need to juggle other responsibilities such as study, work and family. While there are positives, anecdotal evidence suggests that having multiple people confined to the home can also be a barrier to effective online participation, particularly when there is competition for online time as is the case with having children in the home.

A useful future extension of this research may be to determine whether the stated intentions of increased online engagement become evident and how this impacts overall digital confidence, as well as online safety training and support needs particularly around trusted sources of information and support.

Methodology

This report is based on questions about the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on Australian adults' online behaviours and attitudes. The questions were included in an omnibus survey conducted by Omnipoll from 21 to 25 May 2020, with a total sample of 1,229 online adults aged 18 and over. Respondents were drawn from the online consumer panel managed by Lightspeed Research. Quotas were set for location, by gender and age. To reflect the overall population distribution, results were weighted to Australian Bureau of Statistics data on age, highest level of schooling completed, gender and area.