

**Australian Government Department of
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional
Development, Communications and the Arts**

A summary report on qualitative research to
inform a campaign about the *Online Safety
Act 2021*

2 November 2023

Executive Summary

Background and methodology

The **Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth)** (the Act) came into effect on 23 January 2022, introducing a range of new measures to help enhance protections for Australians experiencing serious online abuse. Coinciding with these changes, an **advertising campaign** was run to raise awareness of the new protections.

Evaluation research on the 2022 campaign by Hall and Partners found that it had **limited reach** and indicated a need to **further enhance awareness and understanding** of the protections amongst the Australian public. As such, the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (the Department) commissioned ORIMA Research to conduct **qualitative research to inform a potential extension of the Online Safety campaign**.



The research was conducted between **29 May – 15 June 2023** with a total sample of **n=136 participants**. It was qualitative in nature, being conducted via **13 focus groups (FGs)** and **3 online focus groups (OFGs)** across seven States and Territories with:

- The proposed primary target audience for the extended campaign – females aged 18-45 years; **First Nations** peoples; people from a **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)** background; and people with **disability**;
- The proposed secondary target audience for the extended campaign – members of the **general public with direct and/or indirect experience** of serious online abuse; and
- A potential new audience for the extended campaign – **parents/ carers**.

The project was conducted in accordance with the international quality standard ISO 20252, the international information security standard ISO 27001, as well as the Australian Privacy Principles contained in the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth). ORIMA Research also adheres to the Privacy (Market and Social Research) Code 2021 administered by the Australian Data and Insights Association (ADIA).

Research findings



Context: What's changed since the previous research?

Overall, the research found that since 2021, **changes in both individual online usage as well as the online environment have led to greater potential for exposure to online safety risks**. This includes:

- Participants' **time spent online and their range of activities conducted online** had increased during the COVID pandemic and **had not since returned to the lower pre-COVID levels**. Increased time online contributes to **increased potential exposure** to online harms and a sustained higher level of online safety risk.
- **Online security issues** were more top-of-mind and better understood than online safety issues, particularly compared to the 2021 research. This was particularly due to high-profile data leaks which had increased perceived personal susceptibility to these issues and understanding of associated negative impacts.
- The research found that a range of **online security** and other online issues have **remained conflated with the terminology of 'online safety'** due to the harms associated with them.

- Compared to 2021, there was a **higher degree of uncertainty and subjectivity** among participants in relation to **what constituted 'serious' online abuse**. Compared to 2021, there was also a **lower threshold amongst the target audience for deeming online abuse as 'serious'** due to media coverage and direct/ indirect personal experiences of online abuse.



The existing campaign: Is it still relevant?

- There was **still low awareness of the online safety laws and the eSafety Commissioner**, but a **high perceived value** in knowing about them – many participants reported that knowing of their existence would “empower” them with an additional strategy to manage online risks and provide a “safety net” for them to feel “reassured” and “supported” online.
- Overall, the existing campaign remained **generally relevant and effective**. However, **refinements to the campaign** should be considered to better meet the target audience’s current information needs due to shifts in environment and context since 2021.
- There was **limited awareness and recognition of the existing campaign**, and as such it is likely to have limited wear-out if extended.
- While there was a clear need for a campaign aimed at **parents/ carers**, the current campaign had **limited effectiveness for this audience**, particularly due to their information needs which differed considerably from adults (i.e. in relation to their own online safety). **A single campaign is unlikely to address the needs of both audiences** – i.e. adults (for themselves) and parents/ carers (for their children).



Extending the campaign: Where to next?

- There was a **continued need for the Online Safety campaign**. While the existing campaign remained largely relevant and effective, **minor updates to the campaign will be required to maximise return-on-investment**.
- In particular, there was a need to include:
 - Messaging about the **types of online safety issues covered by the laws** to improve understanding and clarify the scope of the laws.
 - **Updated language** to reflect changes in perceptions of ‘serious’ online abuse – i.e. adopt ‘severe online abuse’ as this more accurately reflected the type of issues covered by the laws.
 - **Case study/ scenario-based content** to demonstrate the benefits/ impacts of the laws and reporting to eSafety in practice.