

5. Attitudes to, and expectations of, media regulation

A main objective of the study was to understand community attitudes, concerns and expectations about media content issues, including:

- > the degree to which content types are perceived as similar across different media platforms
- > expectations of social and cultural policy objectives across different content and platforms
- > how consumers might address any content risks they are exposed to in the new media environment.

The focus groups allowed attitudes about these issues to be explored in depth—with some specific issues being addressed in the online survey. These included awareness of content rules applying to different media, the level and nature of community concerns about television and the internet, and expectations for content regulation that reflects community standards.

Regulation for community standards

Television and radio broadcasters have the primary responsibility for ensuring that the material they broadcast reflects community standards. Most program requirements are governed by codes of practice, determined through industry and community consultation.

Some aspects of programming on free-to-air and subscription television are regulated by the ACMA. The areas covered by the ACMA's commercial free-to-air television regulation include setting minimum levels of Australian content, children's programming, local content, Australian content in advertising and the anti-siphoning of sport. There are different requirements for subscription television (for example, minimum expenditure on Australian drama and anti-terrorism standards) and community broadcasters (for example, sponsorship limits).

Areas of programming on commercial radio regulated by the ACMA cover the disclosure of sponsorship arrangements, ensuring that advertising is clearly distinguishable from all other programs and local content on regional commercial radio stations.

Illegal and offensive online content is regulated via a complaints-based mechanism administered by the ACMA. The scheme is designed to protect consumers, particularly children, from exposure to inappropriate or harmful material.

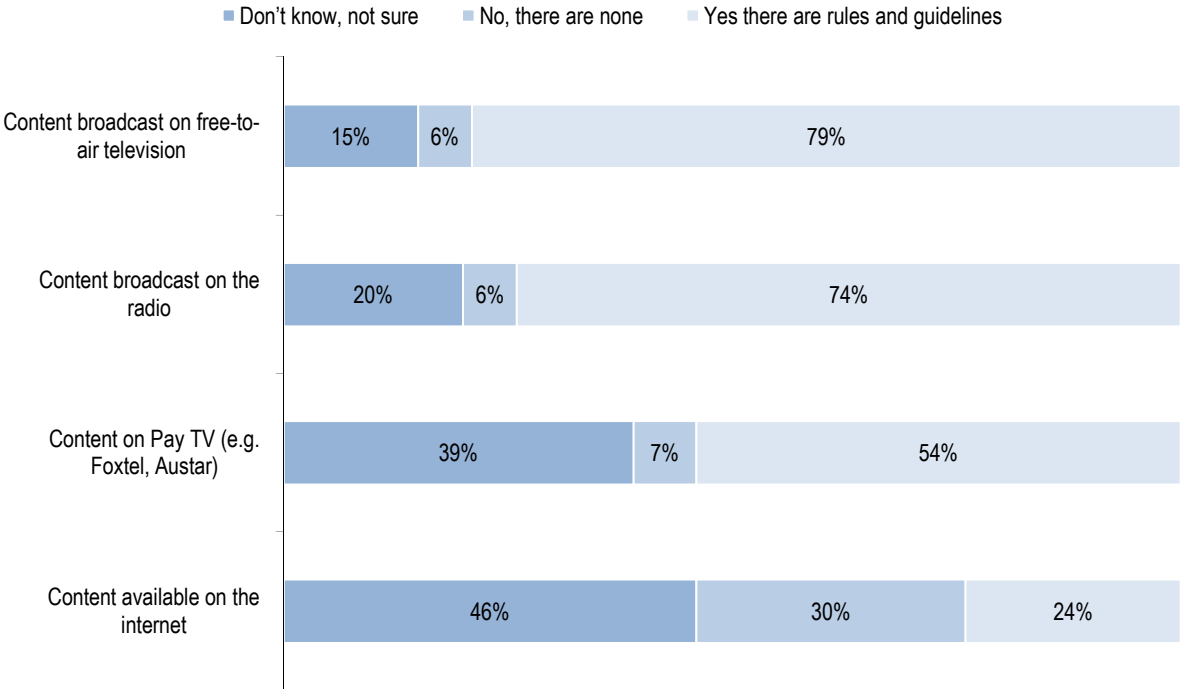
The scheme applies to content accessed through the internet, mobile phones and convergent devices, and applies to content delivered through emerging content services such as live audiovisual streaming services. The ACMA has the authority to direct relevant content service providers to remove prohibited content from their service. Where content is not hosted in Australia and is prohibited, the ACMA will notify the content to the suppliers of approved filters, so that access to the content using such filters is blocked. In addition, regardless of where the content is hosted, if the ACMA considers the content to be of a sufficiently serious nature, it must notify an Australian police force of the content.

The internet industry has also developed codes of practice that support measures to help people manage their use of the internet and the delivery of digital communications and media services, including young people's use of the internet.

Awareness of current regulation of media content

Respondents were more aware that traditional media such as free-to-air television and radio were regulated, with about three-quarters or more believing there were guidelines in place. There was a greater level of uncertainty about subscription television (possibly due to lower levels of familiarity), although over half (54 per cent) of all respondents still indicated that they thought there were guidelines for this medium.

Figure 18 Perceptions of content rules by medium

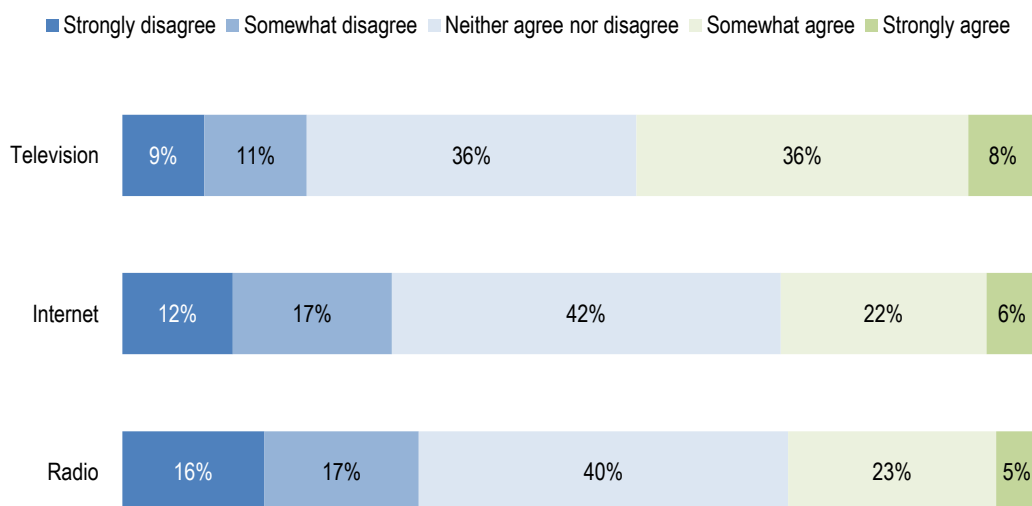


Source: ACMA, Digital Australians online survey, 2011.
E5 ASK ALL: Are there any rules or guidelines that currently apply to content broadcast on television, on the radio or available on the internet? S/R PER ITEM RANDOMISE
Base: Total sample, n=1,250.

In contrast, less than a quarter (24 per cent) of respondents thought there were guidelines in place governing content on the internet. Almost half (46 per cent) were unsure, while 30 per cent thought there were no such guidelines.

Influence of various media sources

Figure 19 Influence of television, internet and radio on views about political and other issues



Source: ACMA, Digital Australians online survey, 2011.

D5 ASK ALL: Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: SR PER ITEM, RANDOMISE

1. The internet is very influential in shaping my view about political and other important issues
2. Television is very influential in shaping my view about political and other important issues
3. Radio is very influential in shaping my view about political and other important issues

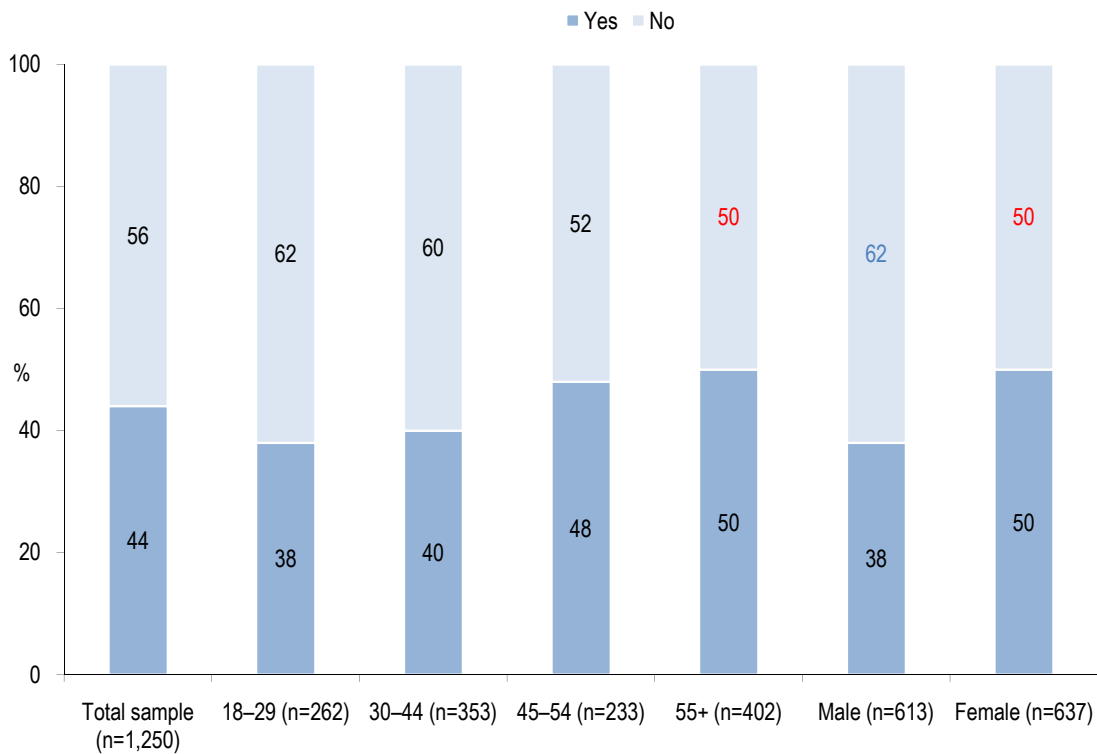
Base: Total sample, n=1,250.

Survey respondents perceived television as being more influential than either the internet or radio in shaping their views about political and other important issues. Forty-four per cent agreed strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement that television 'is very influential in shaping my views about political and other important issues' compared with 28 per cent for both the internet and radio.

Concerns about television content

Respondents were asked whether they had any concerns about what is shown on television. Just under half (44 per cent) of all respondents indicated that they did have concerns, while 56 per cent had no concerns. Younger respondents (those aged 18–29 years) were less likely to have concerns while those aged 55 and over, and female respondents, were more likely to cite concerns about what is shown on television.

Figure 20 Have concerns about what is shown on television



Source: ACMA, Digital Australians online survey, 2011.

E1 ASK ALL: Do you have any concerns about what is shown on TV? S/R

Note: Blue numbers represent differences that are significantly higher and red numbers significantly lower.

Respondents who indicated that they did have concerns about television content were asked to select up to three issues that they had concerns about. They were most likely to select excessive advertising, violence, too many reality programs and sexual content as their biggest concerns.

When UK adults with television in the household were asked a similar question in a 2010 survey by Ofcom, 40 per cent said they had any concerns. These (unprompted) concerns related mainly to offensive content (such as bad language/swearing and violence) and poor quality content or too many repeats.¹²

¹² Ofcom, UK adults' media literacy, April 2011, <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/media-literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/adultmedialitreport11/>.

Table 19 Concerns about what is shown on television

	Total sample (n=554)	Male (n=233)	Female (n=321)
	%	%	%
Too many advertising breaks	45	47	45
Violence	43	35	49
Too many reality programs	36	46	29
Sexual content	32	24	38
Coarse language	23	22	24
Programs where people are made fun of or tricked	17	15	19
Themes like racism, suicide and euthanasia	17	17	16
Drug use/drug references	15	17	13
Too much sport	15	12	17
Not enough program choice	14	17	12
Nudity	13	13	13
Too many American/British programs	7	12	3
Other	7	9	6

Source: ACMA, Digital Australians online survey, 2011.

E2 ASK IF HAVE CONCERNS (CODE 01 ON E1): Which of the following are you concerned about on TV? Please select the three issues that you are most concerned about (you may pick less than three if appropriate) M/R RANDOMISE—RESPONDENT TO SELECT 0-3 RESPONSES

Note: Blue numbers represent differences that are significantly higher and red numbers significantly lower.

Base: Respondents who had concerns about what is shown on TV, n= 554.

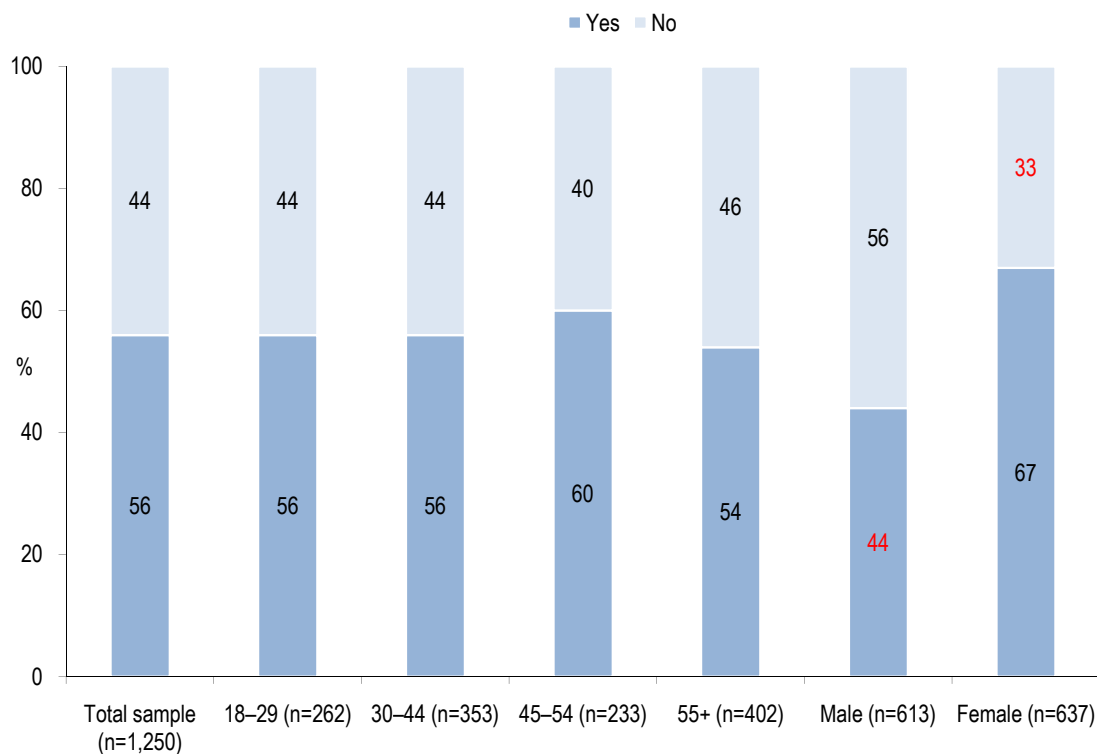
As shown in Table 19, female respondents were more likely to be concerned about violence and sexual content, while males were more likely to be concerned about too many reality programs and too many British/American programs on television.

Parents with children under 18 were no more likely to have concerns about television than other respondents but those who did have concerns were more likely to select sexual content and nudity than were other adults.

Concerns about the internet

Respondents were also asked whether they had any concerns about content on the internet. Respondents generally reported a greater level of concern about this medium than television (56 per cent compared with 44 per cent). As shown in Figure 21, there were no significant differences by age, although women were more likely to report having concerns about what is on the internet than men. Parents of children under 18 were also more likely to be concerned than were other adults (63 per cent compared with 53 per cent).

Figure 21 Have concerns about what is on the internet



Source: ACMA, Digital Australians online survey, 2011.

E3 ASK ALL: Do you have any concerns about what is on the internet? [Note that access can be on any device connected to the internet: a desktop computer, a laptop computer or netbook, a mobile phone (e.g. iPhone or other 'smart phone'), an iPod or similar device, a tablet computer (e.g. an iPad), or an internet-enabled television] S/R

Note: Blue numbers represent differences that are significantly higher and red numbers significantly lower.

When asked to select up to three issues that they were concerned about, respondents who earlier indicated that they did have concerns about online content selected a different suite of concerns to those reported about television.

These concerns reflected consumers' focus on the technology, and caution about aspects of the online environment, privacy and inappropriate content.

In contrast to the concerns cited about television, there were no significant differences between male and female respondents in the responses to this question. However, similar to the concerns identified about television, parents of children under 18 were more likely to report concerns about sexual content and nudity than were other adults. But like adults generally, the top concerns for parents about the internet were identity fraud, websites showing abuse of children and computer security.

A similar proportion of UK adult internet users (56 per cent) said they had concerns about what is on the internet when asked in the 2010 survey by Ofcom. The top (unprompted) concerns related to offensive/illegal content (such as content unsuitable for children and sexual content/pornography) and identity fraud.¹³

¹³ *ibid.*

Table 20 Concerns about what is on the internet

	Total sample (n=701)	Male (n=272)	Female (n=429)
	%	%	%
Identity fraud/others getting access to my personal details	54	50	57
Websites showing abuse of children	48	48	47
Computer viruses/security	37	37	38
Personal information that companies/governments may hold about me	20	19	21
Sexual content	20	16	22
Websites instructing on committing crimes	19	21	17
Websites instructing how to commit suicide/self-harm	19	16	20
Gambling on the internet	13	16	12
Violence	12	13	10
Themes like racism, suicide and euthanasia	9	10	9
Nudity	9	10	8
Too much advertising	8	9	8
Content where people are made fun of or tricked	6	6	7
Poor quality content	6	6	6
Drug use/drug references	6	8	4
Coarse language	3	3	2
Other	2	2	2

Source: ACMA, Digital Australians online survey, 2011.

E4 IF AT ALL CONCERNED (CODES 02-05 ON E3): Which of the following are you concerned about on the internet? Please select the three issues that you are most concerned about (you may pick less than three if appropriate) M/R RANDOMISE—RESPONDENT TO SELECT 0-3 RESPONSES

Base: Respondents who were at all concerned about content on the internet, n=701.

Expectations for regulation across different content and platforms

One of the key findings from the focus group discussions was the expectation that community standards should apply differently to content type rather than the delivery channel.

Participants consistently distinguished between user-generated and professionally produced content. This distinction was driven by the perception of each content type having a different 'community'. Content that was professionally produced (such as films, television programs or series) was expected to be consumed on a mass scale by the broader community and, as such, it was expected to reflect broad community standards. Its producers usually needed to attract an audience that involved the mainstream population in order to have a profitable, worthwhile enterprise.

Accordingly, participants believed professionally produced content should reflect collective views about desirable content and shared cultural and social values. It was felt that professional content that did not reflect the collective views would ultimately not be profitable and, therefore, not sustainable.

On the other hand, user-generated content was expected to be consumed by a more limited number of individuals who choose to do so. As such, participants generally

considered that user-generated content should reflect the principle of individual expression and consumption, meaning it did not necessarily have to conform to community standards. Illegal content was the exception here.

Content that originates online is much less likely to be used by broadcasters or others offline. However, content that is professionally produced for linear viewing is much more likely to be found online as well as offline, meaning that the flow of professionally produced content is almost exclusively *from* broadcast and other traditional media *to* the internet. Accordingly, expectations about this content tended to follow that flow—for example, if something had been broadcast and then was made available on a catch-up service, then the same consumer expectations were likely to apply to both.

This general finding was reflected in attitudes to media brands—if the brand was well established, then the expectation was that the same standards would apply whether content was offline or online. Making a distinction between offline and online content was not as important to discussion group participants, but trust and confidence in the brand was.

Conversely, if the content service had been founded on the internet; for example, YouTube, then the expectations generally aligned with other expectations about online content—essentially, that few, if any, content-related standards were enforced, apart from those to do with illegal content.

When using YouTube and similar sites, which allow the sharing of video clips online, it was evident that many respondents accessed both user-generated content and professional content uploaded by media outlets and others. However, it was clear that views and expectations about video available on these sites depended to a large extent on whether it had been professionally produced or user-generated.

When user-generated content was picked up by broadcasters, there were a range of expectations about how it should be used, including the need to obtain consent from those depicted.

Community standards and classification for professionally produced content

Overall, the classification system for television programs was seen to reflect broad community standards. Participants agreed it was sensible to implement a system that classified programs according to their suitability for different age groups. They regarded this as a courtesy service for viewers, allowing them to make appropriate decisions about what they, and their children, choose to consume, and there was an expectation that subscription television services and ‘new’ free-to-air channels also follow the same classification system.

The classification system was mainly being used by parents in the groups as a guide for monitoring the content children may consume. It provided an indication as to whether parents should watch the programs with children or not allow them to watch them at all, as it gave some indication as to whether the program included violence, sex scenes, nudity or adult content:

It’s especially useful with other people’s kids. You can just say no to them watching it because you don’t know what their parents would do.

It’s an alert to me that I need to watch the show with them to see what is happening.

The classification system was less likely to be used as a guide for adult consumption, with participants explaining that they were able to determine the suitability of what they wanted to watch.

Parents regarded classification ratings and consumer advice to be one useful tool among others that can be used in the offline environment. Other physical interventions and tools that are available to parents to help them monitor what content their children view include:

- > timeslot restrictions
- > physically monitoring the content by watching the program with their child
- > locks on digital television and Freeview channels
- > parental lock for subscription television.

The expectation among participants was that those providing content would be responsible for providing advice on standards and ratings. Currently, providers of professional content made for broadcasting are largely responsive to the needs and wants of their customers.

That said, there was also an underlying expectation by participants that behind the scenes there was a government regulatory body for broadcast television to whom community members could complain should they be unable to resolve an issue with a provider. Many participants were not exactly sure *who* they would turn to; however, a minority were aware of the ACMA and the role it has to play.

Community standards for content online

From the qualitative research, parents in particular recognised the challenge the online environment posed in meeting community standards and the potential risks to their children. Physical interventions and tools, such as timeslots for particular programs and locking channels to restrict access, were seen as not effective for online content, given that most content is able to be downloaded or streamed on demand.

In these circumstances, participants expected online content to meet the standards of the website's end users. Three different types of content were identified, with each expected to reflect different standards:

- > Smaller sites, predominantly made up of user-generated content—for example, many blog sites—that have niche consumption, were expected to meet the standards of the small group of end users. Given this, participants did not believe standards needed to be so encompassing. Instead, they believed it should be up to individuals to self-regulate and decide for themselves whether to use those sites.
- > Larger sites hosting user-generated content and that are bordering on mass consumption—for example, YouTube, Facebook—were expected to reflect relatively broad community standards. Participants expected these sites to demonstrate a sense of corporate social responsibility by monitoring content and, at a minimum, responding to users' complaints. At the same time, they believed users should still take responsibility for self-regulating their use of these sites.
- > Those sites with professionally produced content aimed at mass consumption were expected to uphold broader community standards. Participants believed these sites should be subject to some regulation and be responsible for providing information and advice according to established community standards.

Ideally, participants considered that professionally produced content available online should provide guidance about what that content contains. Participants believed the classification and ratings information that applied to broadcast television should also apply to on-demand television. They also considered that classification and ratings should apply to movies and games available online, given that all professionally produced mass-consumed content should be subject to community standards. Furthermore, as parents were less likely to have a comparative reference for movies and games than for television shows, it was felt to be almost more important that classification and ratings apply to these products.

Participants accepted that children would be likely to ignore classifications and rating advice provided for 'online' content and most were unlikely to alert their parent of the classification given. Indeed, this system could potentially backfire if some children actually sought out content they were otherwise not allowed to consume. To date, some parents reported finding their children watching television shows on their tablets and computers that they had not been allowed to watch on television.

That's what happened. We didn't let him watch *Family Guy* and the next thing you know he has it on his computer thingy [iPad].

Kids won't pay any attention to it.

Despite these limitations, a classification and ratings system for online content was still considered useful for parents; in particular, to provide a framework for them to understand and manage their child's online consumption of professionally produced content. Parents tended to manage children's access by physically watching or monitoring what content they downloaded.

Given that most participants recognised a regulatory body exists to monitor and regulate professional content on broadcast television, some assumed that this may also be the case with online content provided by those with an offline presence.

Expectations of community standards for user-generated content online

In contrast to expectations about professional content, participants did not see user-generated content as something that should, or could, be regulated. Participants recognised that the internet is a tool for individuals to express themselves and their view. It also provides people with a vast array of choices about where to source information and is a means by which to educate people. Respondents felt very strongly about this. They considered that placing limitations on what can be accessed on the internet would be suppressive and did not accord with Australian culture:

You'd end up being like China.

That said, it was recognised that children may need to be protected from some online user-generated content where there is little reference or guidance provided as to the type of material. The greatest concern among parents in the groups was content containing violence and extreme behaviour:

You don't know what that video is going to really show when you click on the link.

They think it's going to be funny, but really they end up seeing things they are just not ready for.

I limit my children's exposure to watching the news due to the horrific image they show ... but you can't do that online ... they come across all sorts of things.

Although the capacity and resilience to deal with inappropriate content online is learnt over time by parents and their children, some parents expressed concerns about the speed in which developments have taken place on the internet and the sheer volume of content that is available to children.

Participants could see, for example, that parents could value having some guidance as to what user-generated content contains. However, in practice, all participants recognised that a classification and ratings system for user-generated content would logistically not be possible, given the sheer amount of this type of content that is available online:

Who would want to be the person who sits there and classifies all the YouTube videos?

Participants also recognised that it would be impossible to police or enforce classification or ratings systems among site providers.

That's ridiculous, totally impossible. Only in *1984*.

Ultimately, any sense of community standards applying to user-generated content was driven by those who consumed that content. People considered it was up to them to censor or regulate any content they were not happy with, either by not visiting the site or by complaining about it to the site owner or administrator.

Parents in the focus groups accepted that they should take responsibility and act as the regulator of their children's internet use. Many said they were able to achieve this by using a number of tools or mechanisms.

First, they felt that educating themselves and ensuring their children were educated about the possible dangers of online content helped them to manage usage. Parents talked about trying to keep up to date with developments. However, it was evident that not all parents were finding it easy to keep up with the rapid changes or knew what to look out for.

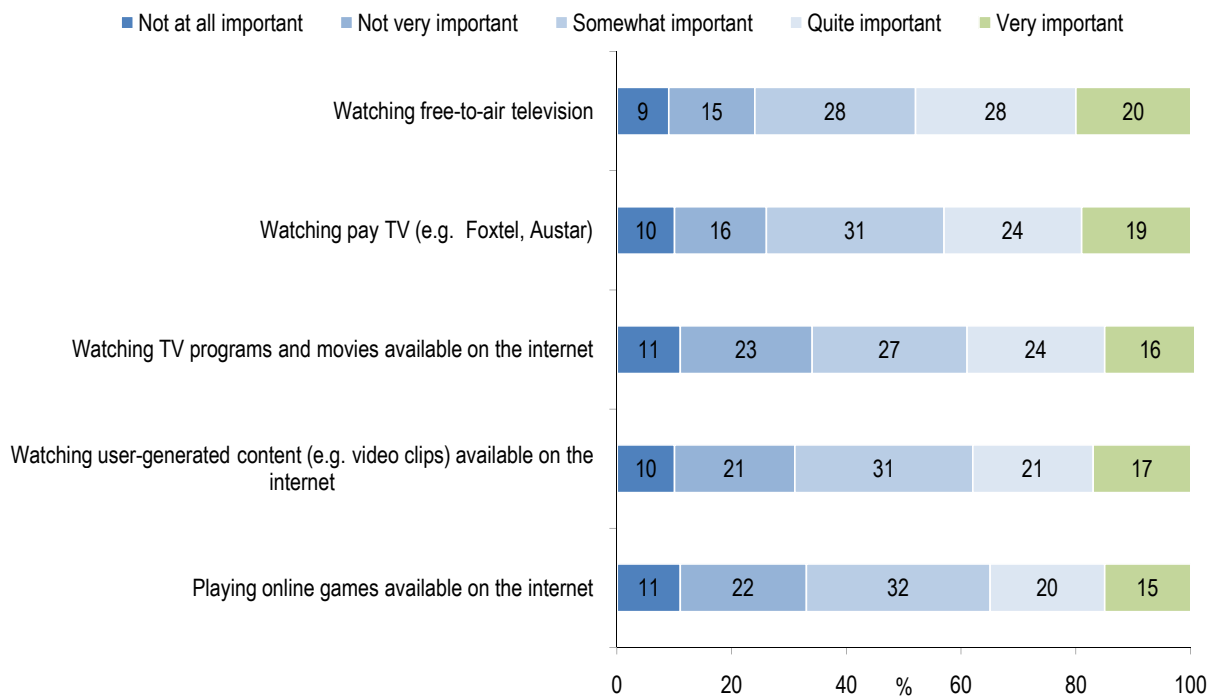
Second, parents recognised that actually monitoring their children's use, while not always possible, was still one of the most effective means of regulating usage. Third, they accepted that there is hard and soft infrastructure that helps them to regulate access. For example, only allowing their children to have a standard mobile phone, instead of a smartphone, is one way to limit access to content. They also talked about having a limited download amount and content filters to their internet at home. Some also used the parental lock function that is available on some digital televisions.

Usefulness of consumer information across media

The results of the quantitative survey supported the qualitative findings. As shown in Figure 22, when participants were asked to indicate how important they thought consumer information such as classifications and ratings were for broadcast television programs and content on the internet, between 35 and 48 per cent of those who had undertaken each activity in the past month saw this consumer information as at least 'quite important'. Few said that they thought these were 'not at all important'.

While there were few differences in the perceived importance of this consumer information across media, it was seen as being slightly more important for traditional television content (whether on free-to-air or subscription television) than for user-generated content on the internet, watching television/movies on the internet or online games.

Figure 22 Perceived importance of consumer information across media



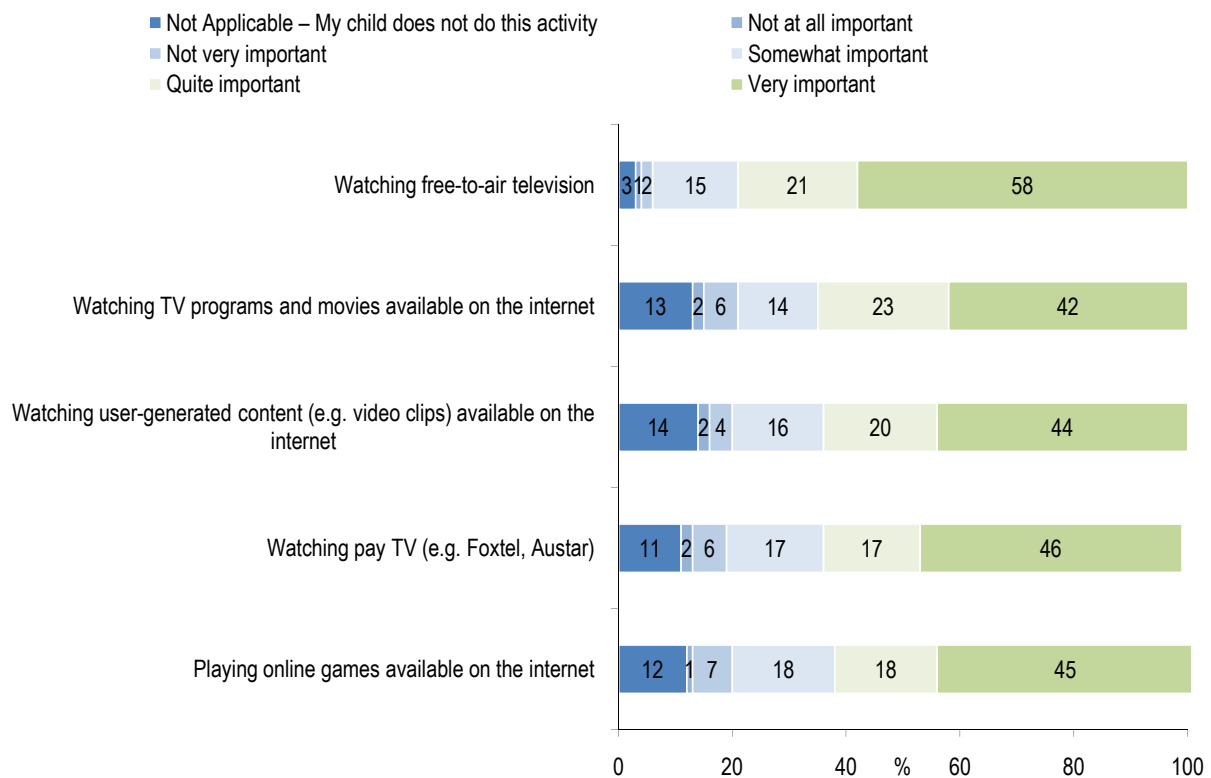
Source: ACMA, Digital Australians online survey, 2011.

F1 ASK ALL: Broadcast television programs, and some content on the internet includes information such as classification, ratings or other information to help people decide whether content is suitable for them and their families. How important is it to you to have this type of information available for you personally to decide whether content is suitable for you. When you are...? S/R PER ITEM, SHOW ONLY THOSE ACTIVITIES THAT RESPONDENTS REPORT DOING, RANDOMISE

Base: Respondents who have undertaken each activity in the past month, n=323–816.

Across all media, participants with children under 18 placed greater importance on classification and rating information than did other online adult Australians. The same question was asked of these participants with children under 18—but this time specifically in relation to content for their children. As shown in Figure 23, information about content was generally seen as being more important for children. Between 63 and 79 per cent of parents who themselves had used each medium in the past month indicated that they saw this information as very or quite important when deciding which content their children should view across different media.

Figure 23 Perceived importance of consumer information for children’s viewing across media



Source: ACMA, Digital Australians online survey, 2011.

F1 ASK ALL: Broadcast television programs, and some content on the internet includes information such as classification, ratings or other information to help people decide whether content is suitable for them and their families. How important is it to you to have this type of information available for you personally to decide whether content is suitable for you. When you are...? S/R PER ITEM, SHOW ONLY THOSE ACTIVITIES THAT RESPONDENTS REPORT DOING, RANDOMISE

Base: Respondents who have undertaken each activity in the past month, n=323—816.

Responsibility for restricting children’s access to inappropriate online content

When all participants were asked which groups they thought were responsible for preventing children from seeing content with too much sex and violence on the internet, they clearly indicated that most responsibility for this lies with a parent (this was in line with the qualitative findings).

Half (50 per cent) of all participants also felt that industry had some responsibility, while almost four in 10 (39 per cent) also nominated the government. While these views were broadly held across the sample, about half (48 per cent) of participants with children under 18 felt government had a role, and women were more likely to report that they felt parents and industry had a role to play.

Table 21 Responsibility for preventing children from seeing too much sex or violence on the internet

	Total sample (n=1,250)	18–29 (n=262)	30–44 (n=353)	45–54 (n=233)	55+ (n=402)	Male (n=613)	Female (n=637)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Parents	89	85	89	87	94	87	92
The industry/ content providers/ broadcasters	50	49	49	56	47	43	56
The government	39	41	42	42	33	36	41
Someone else	2	1	2	2	2	2	2
No one has responsibility	2	5	1	0	2	3	1

Source: ACMA, Digital Australians online survey, 2011.

G1 ASK ALL: In your opinion, which of the following groups are responsible for preventing children (under the age of 18) from seeing content with too much sex or violence on the internet? M/R RANDOMISE

Note: Blue numbers represent differences that are significantly higher and red numbers significantly lower.

Furthermore, when asked who they felt had *most* responsibility for this, 80 per cent of respondents indicated that they felt parents did. Twelve percent said industry and eight per cent said the government. While there were some significant differences by age and gender, the overall pattern of the results (that is, the order) was consistent.

Table 22 Who is *most* responsible for preventing children from seeing too much sex or violence on the internet?

	Total sample (n=1,223)	18–29 (n=250)	30–44 (n=348)	45–54 (n=232)	55+ (n=393)	Male (n=596)	Female (n=627)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Parents	80	73	81	77	85	79	81
The industry/ content providers/ broadcasters	12	15	11	17	9	12	13
The government	8	12	8	6	5	8	7
Someone else	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

Source: ACMA, Digital Australians online survey, 2011.

G2 ASK THOSE SELECTING CODES 01-04 AT G1: Who do you consider to be most responsible for preventing children from seeing content with too much sex or violent on the internet? S/R RETAIN ORDER FROM G1

Note: Blue numbers represent differences that are significantly higher and red numbers significantly lower.

Base: Respondents who thought that anyone was responsible for preventing children from seeing certain content on the internet, n=1,223.

From the qualitative and quantitative findings, there appeared to be a need for ongoing education to assist parents ‘keep their heads above water’ as they try and keep up with the changes in media availability and access.

However, the key challenge in this is that parents often struggle to be proactive in keeping abreast of the changes. They are often looking to be educated after an incident in which their child accesses inappropriate content. This is when the provision of resources for parents would be extremely useful.

In line with attitudes to community standards, group participants found the idea of applying some content regulations to professionally generated Australian online media content to be entirely reasonable. Such regulation was not seen as limiting individual expression, learning and choice, as users would still be able to access the material

from overseas. Instead, it was perceived as reflecting broader community standards in a manner that would apply to similar professionally produced content offline.