

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **HALF OF KIWIS ENCOUNTER MISINFORMATION EVERY DAY**

*New research reveals climate change, vaccine claims, racial intolerance among leading types of misinformation*

Sharing false information intended to deceive and mislead people is one of New Zealand's biggest online dangers, according to new research.

Everyday half of the country (48%) are being misled by information they believe to be true. The majority of kiwi's see some form of misinformation weekly (79%) or monthly (91%).

[The research](#), commissioned by New Zealand's online safety organisation, Netsafe, and conducted by Yabble, aimed to understand peoples' experiences with disinformation in New Zealand.

It found the leading types of misinformation range from climate change and racial intolerance through to Covid-19 and vaccine claims. False claims about family or friends were also prominent.

"Misinformation has the potential to severely damage relationships, news channels, businesses and high-profile Kiwi's reputation," says Brent Carey, Netsafe CEO.

"There has been a skyrocket of online activity carrying on after Covid, including harmful content. Through research like this, we can see the extent of the problem and how much misinformation kiwis are seeing online."

#### **UNDERSTANDING WHAT MISINFORMATION IS AND WHERE IT LIES**

The report revealed that over three-quarters (77%) of Kiwis found misinformation on social media, and two-thirds (68%) through conversations with others or via overseas news sites.

Carey says while people stay connected with each other, and with what is happening in the world through social media, it has become a hub for misinformation.

"For example, someone will see false information on Facebook and believe it to be true. They tell their family and friends what they have seen and from there, the misinformation spreads like wildfire."

The research also revealed many New Zealanders don't understand what misinformation is. Only twenty eight percent feel confident to identify it, and just over one in ten (12%) are concerned about falling for misinformation.

When looking into the media, the research found the majority of New Zealander's (69%) trust the news they see from reputable media outlets. However, more than half (56%) have experienced misinformation from online New Zealand news sites, over two thirds (68%) from online overseas news sites, and half (52%) from television news.

"The stats are concerning because people are struggling to decipher between the information online that is fake and the information that is true."

#### **VULNERABLE GROUPS TARGETED MOST**

New Zealand's most vulnerable groups are frequently targeted, specifically the LGBTQIA+ community, Pasifika, neurodiverse, 60+, and teens.

The LGBTQIA+ community is affected the most with over half (59%) having a negative experience with misinformation in the last year.

Māori are significantly more vulnerable than other groups to seeing misleading information about racial intolerance, with nearly three quarters (74%) experiencing it every month.

The research found where people and groups get their news from played a significant role in the level of misinformation they receive. Groups that spent a lot of time on social media experience more misinformation than groups that don't.

## **SHARING MISINFORMATION AND ITS IMPACT**

Looking into how misinformation is circulated, the research found nearly half the people who spread it (48%) thought they were genuinely being helpful, and just under a quarter (24%) were trying to improve people's knowledge and awareness.

Once people discovered the information was false, over three-quarters (76%) felt angry, guilty, confused, and concerned.

"Half the problem isn't posts that appear online, but people who by accident believe what they read and then share the information to family and friends," says Carey.

When asked about the impact of misinformation, over seven in ten (77%) believed it damaged the public's trust in the government and nearly three-quarters (72%) agreed that it hurt the Covid-19 response. Two thirds (66%) agreed misinformation will have a significant impact on the 2023 election.

## **THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF MISINFORMATION**

Looking into what type of misinformation groups are exposed to, the report found:

- Those aged 60+ are more likely to have experienced daily mis/disinformation about Covid19 or the vaccine
- Females are more likely than males to experience misleading information about celebrities, with one in five experiencing this daily
- Younger Kiwis (aged 13-17 years) are significantly less likely to experience misleading information about politics, as are Pasifika and other ethnic groups
- 18–29-year-olds have a higher frequency of experiencing information about conspiracy theories
- LGBTQIA+ and neurodiverse people are more likely to experience others expressing opinions that contradict science or history. Around four in five are experiencing this at least monthly
- Those aged 65 and older, and neurodiverse people, experience misleading information about climate change daily more than other groups

Carey says beyond how people are personally being affected, misinformation is having a damaging impact on society.

"I think everyone saw the Covid conspiracy theories get way out of hand and separate family on friends, depending on what they believed.

"With 2023 being an election year, the management and need for increased awareness about what misinformation is and the harm it can cause is hugely important for New Zealand's future. We not only need to make it easier for this sort of information to be removed, but we need to ensure both

Kiwis and the decision makers at social media platforms know what forms and types of misinformation are out there and what it looks like.”

**-ENDS-**

This research was conducted online between 23rd December 2022 – 12th February 2023. The sample comprised a nationally representative sample of 2,089 New Zealanders.

### **About Netsafe**

Netsafe is an independent non-profit organisation supporting people in Aotearoa to have safe and positive online experiences. We keep people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice, and education. Visit [netsafe.org.nz](https://netsafe.org.nz) for free resources or to report incidents of online harm.

For more information, please contact

Nik Hancock

0211423990

[nik@boydpr.co.nz](mailto:nik@boydpr.co.nz)