Te Mana Whakaatu
CLASSIFICATION OFFICE

Kōrerotahi.
Mātakitahi.

What we're watching

New Zealanders' views about what
we see on screen and online

What we're watching:

New Zealanders' views about what we see on screen and online

CONTENT WARNING

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Te Mana Whakaatu
CLASSIFICATION OFFICE

Kōrerotahi.
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KANTAR PUBLIC

June 2022

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Foreword

ACTING CHIEF CENSOR RUPERT ABLETT-HAMPSON, TE MANA WHAKAATU – CLASSIFICATION OFFICE

Last year Te Mana Whakaatu – Classification Office published research on a very specific type of harmful content – misinformation[1]. This year the Office's research takes a step back to take a broader look at content, and the harm from content.

The research in this report provides significant insight into New Zealanders' views about the type of harms that come from content, and the areas that cause them most concern. We can see, for example, that New Zealanders are concerned about the depictions of problems in society, such as sexual violence and harassment, self-harm and suicide, racism and violence.

The research also shows that New Zealanders are particularly concerned about the content we find online, in social media and websites. Many thought it was hard to avoid harmful online content generally and, in particular, most believed it was difficult to protect children from seeing that content.

I'm not surprised people are concerned about the prevalence of online harm. Over recent years, online harms have reached into real life causing destruction and death. The failure of many to take advantage of vaccines for Covid-19, and the occupation of Parliament's grounds, were founded on vaccine conspiracy theories that have flooded social media. The racist 'great replacement' conspiracy theory, fostered online, motivated the terrorist who killed 51 people in Christchurch in March 2019. It continues to cause harm, most recently on 14 May 2022 in Buffalo, USA, where 10 were killed by a person citing the theory as their motivation.

Examples like this mean it is also not surprising to find that most New Zealanders lack confidence in tech companies to keep them safe online.

Many people did not think the current system for regulating online content was working well to protect rangatahi and tamariki.

This research is published at a very opportune time. The Government has commissioned a review of media and online content regulation. The review will design and implement a new approach to content regulation that minimises the risk of harm to New Zealanders. The Department of Internal Affairs and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage leads this work, and I commend this research to them. Our research represents the concerns, views and experiences of New Zealanders on this important issue – an issue that presents real challenges and demands our attention in our ever-changing media landscape.

Rupert Ablett-Hampson - Acting Chief Censor

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1   Te Mana Whakaatu Classification Office. (2021). *The Edge of the Infodemic: Challenging Misinformation in Aotearoa*. https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/resources/research/the-edge-of-the-infodemic

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Key findings

New Zealanders are concerned about children and young people seeing harmful content

There is widespread concern about children and young people seeing harmful content – whether in movies and shows, video games, or on social media or other websites. The highest levels of concern are related to content in online spaces.

Most New Zealanders believe that content can have a negative influence on children and young people in various ways, from their emotional wellbeing and mental health to attitudes about suicide, violence, or sex and relationships.

But New Zealanders obviously see that such content can have positive or negative effects depending on what the content and context is. For example, people see that content can have both positive and negative influences in relation to 'attitudes towards people who are different to them', and 'attitudes about sex and relationships'.

83%

are concerned about harmful or inappropriate content in social media, video-sharing sites or other websites.

Most think it's hard to protect our kids online

Most New Zealanders think it's hard to protect children from inappropriate or harmful online content.

Families use various tools to help them manage kids' access to content, including age ratings and parental controls. Parents and caregivers think that age ratings and content warnings are particularly useful in this area.

Asked about their own knowledge of online safety, a majority felt they personally know enough to help their whānau stay safe online, although relatively few felt highly confident about this.

84%

of those who had recently helped to choose a movie, show or video game for a child or young person think age ratings are important.

It's common for people of all ages to see harmful content online

Harmful online content can be hard to avoid, regardless of someone's age. This is a common experience for New Zealanders – 42% agreed it was hard for them to avoid seeing harmful or offensive content online, while 27% disagreed.

Many New Zealanders had seen online content that promotes or encourages harmful attitudes or behaviours. This can include content that encourages racism, sexism, misogyny, hatred or extremism.

One in three had seen content that directly promotes or encourages violence towards others. This includes violence towards others based on things such as race, culture, religion, sexuality or gender, and violent extremism or terrorism. One in five had seen content that encourages some form of self-harming behaviour, such as suicide, self-harm, and eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia.

Asked about the impact of content on themselves, their families and their communities, some talked about the significant distress they personally had experienced, while others talked about the impact they had seen on friends and loved ones.

33%

had seen content that directly promotes or encourages violence towards others based on things like race, culture, religion, sexuality or gender.

New Zealanders support regulation of harmful online content

There is widespread support among New Zealanders for regulating harmful content. However, only a minority think the current regulatory system is working well to keep young people safe from harmful content online.

People also lack confidence in tech companies to keep them safe. Just 33% 'somewhat' or 'strongly' agreed that online platforms provide what people need to keep them safe.

Asked about what more could be done to help keep themselves and their whānau safe online, people talked about the importance of:

- stronger and better regulation
- better education, information and support
- improved technical solutions and tools
- the need for tech/social media companies to do more.

89%

thought it is useful for an organisation to do things such as deciding age ratings, classifying potentially illegal content, and providing guidance and resources about content.

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Background and objectives

Who we are

Te Mana Whakaatu – Classification Office (the Office) is an independent Crown entity responsible for classifying material that may need to be restricted or banned. This can include films, books, video games and online content. We conduct research and produce evidence-based resources to promote media literacy and enable New Zealanders to make informed choices about what they watch.

The Office cannot restrict or ban content on the basis of fairness, balance or accuracy. However, we do have a mandate to restrict material that could encourage behaviour that poses a risk of self-harm or harm to others, and material that promotes criminal, terrorist or violent acts.

Why do this research?

Our research over the past few years has focused on some critical issues, such as misinformation and young people viewing pornography. These studies highlight the real world impacts of potentially harmful content from a New Zealand perspective.

We saw the need to follow this up by exploring New Zealanders' views about a broader scope of content – whether in entertainment content such as movies, shows and video games, or in posts or videos on social media or other online spaces.

WHAT'S THE HARM?

Content can have a harmful or negative impact in various ways, both on individuals and on society more broadly.

Our previous report showed how misinformation affects all of us, regardless of our own beliefs, and how what people see and hear can influence their attitudes and behaviour in a way that can put others' health at risk.

The fear or distress of a child seeing a scary movie might be relatively mild or fleeting, but it can also lead to longer term fears and anxieties. Likewise, an adult seeing a violent car crash on screen might cause them to remember or relive past trauma.

These are just a few examples of how content on screen and online can have a negative real world impact on people. The common factor is that the harm is real.

Online, people's experience of content is often shaped by the way in which it is being shared, commented on and promoted. This includes potentially harmful 'person-to-person' activities such as bullying or harassment, sending unsolicited and unwanted content, violating people's privacy, and grooming or exploiting individuals.

Our role is to assess content – meaning what people see in movies and games, and also posts, pictures or videos shared online. The main focus and subject of this research is the content itself and the potential harms associated with it. Nonetheless, it's not always possible to draw a strict line between 'content' and 'behaviour', and participants in our research won't always have been thinking of these as separate things.

We believe that effectively responding to online harm requires individuals, communities, organisations and government agencies to work together. This research will add to the evidence base for understanding the experiences and views of New Zealanders about online content, and its impact on individuals, whānau and communities.

How we receive harmful content

Algorithm
(pushed to users)

Targeted
(intentionally sent)

Passive

Seeking out
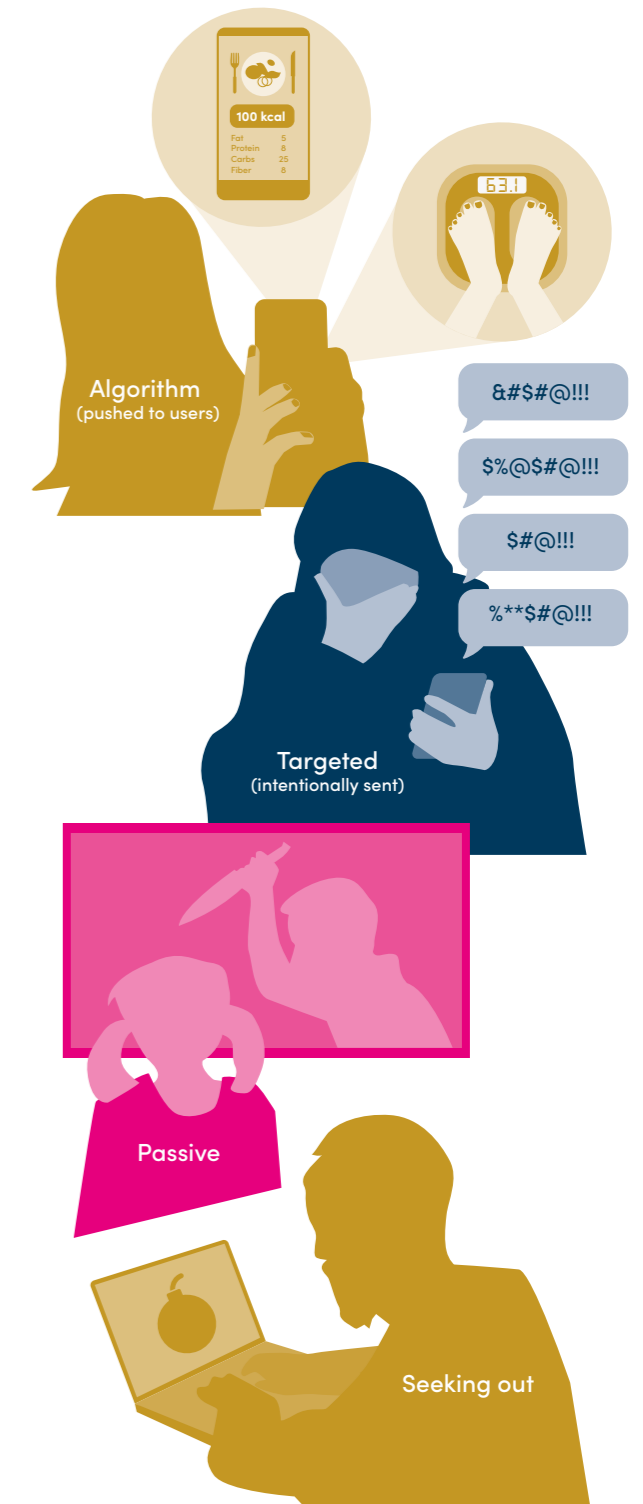
Research method

Research questions

Our research explores the following topics:

- New Zealanders' views about specific types of content and the potential for harm to children, young people and the wider community.

- Perceptions of the influence or impact of this content.

- People's personal experiences of potentially harmful content.

- Ways in which people manage content to keep themselves and their families safe, and perceptions about age ratings and the classification system.

- Views about how to mitigate potential harms of online content, including measures by industry and government regulation.

The first part of the survey focused mainly on movies, shows and games, along with questions about official age ratings that typically apply to this type of content. This was followed by questions focused more on the type of content seen on social media, video-sharing sites or other websites.

Survey design

To effectively cover the scope of our research objectives, our research team looked at a variety of local and international surveys, combining elements and adapting their approaches and methodologies to make this study relevant in the context of Aotearoa. The final survey was designed in conjunction with Kantar Public.

A nationally representative survey

A nationwide online survey was conducted from 22 February to 14 March 2022, involving 1,201 New Zealanders. This included 1,001 adults and a 'youth booster' of 200 young people aged 16 or 17, as the wellbeing of young people is central to the values and kaupapa of the Office. This oversampling of the youth population allowed for a more in-depth analysis and it was accounted for when weighting different demographic groups in the full sample.

Adult survey respondents were recruited from the Kantar and Dynata online consumer panels, and youth respondents (16 to 17 year olds) were recruited via their parents or adult caregivers who are members of these online panels.

A combination of pre-survey quotas and post-survey weighting was used to ensure the results are representative of all New Zealanders by age within gender, region, ethnicity, and household income by household size. The maximum margin of error on the total group n=1,201 is +/-2.8% at the 95% confidence interval. Subgroup differences noted in the report are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level unless specifically noted otherwise.

Privacy and confidentiality

The survey includes questions of a sometimes personal and potentially sensitive nature, and it was important that participants felt comfortable giving open and honest answers. Participants were informed that their privacy is guaranteed, and that their names will never be linked to their responses.

The survey contained helpline information so participants could easily seek support if necessary.

Terminology

Content – This broadly refers to:

- commercial entertainment, such as movies, shows/TV series and video games, regardless of where these are viewed or accessed; and

- video, images, text and other material people see online – for example, on social media, video-sharing sites or other websites.

Shows – Refers to TV series or shows. This is used in a general sense or sometimes refers specifically to shows available on commercial streaming services.

Age ratings – Refers to ratings or classifications issued under New Zealand's Films, Videos and Publications Classification Act 1993. This might refer to a 'classification label' or the specific symbol on a label (such as PG, M or R16).

Content warning – Refers to the content information provided with official age ratings – for example, 'violence, offensive language' (also known as a 'descriptive note').

Youth or young people – These terms generally refer to people aged 13 to 17. In the context of youth survey participants, it refers to people aged between 16 and 17. Young people are sometimes referred to as 'rangatahi'.

Parents and caregivers – When referring to specific findings in this report, this means people who currently have parental or caregiver responsibilities for someone under the age of 18 in their household.

Context and limitations

This survey provides a snapshot of beliefs and attitudes at a particular point in time. Local or international events, controversy about a popular movie or show, or concern about content being shared on social media platforms will have an influence on perceptions and concerns around content more broadly.

This survey took place between 22 February and 14 March 2022, and responses to the survey must be considered within a wider context of recent local and world events. For example, participants were completing this survey during a period of widespread community transmission of the Omicron variant of Covid-19, and the 'anti-mandate' protests at Parliament – both of which received continuous media coverage, with news and commentary shared widely on social media platforms. The Russian invasion of Ukraine also began during this period, and likewise became a common topic in news media and social media.

These events were mentioned by a number of participants in relation to negative experiences with online content, and concerns about the impact of such content. As such, results may have differed if the survey had been carried out even a few weeks earlier or later.

Questions also relied on participants' subjective opinions or beliefs about various topics – for example, whether content they had seen promotes or encourages harmful attitudes or behaviours. This is not intended to provide an objective or precise measure of exposure to specific types of material.

Reading tables and charts

Percentages in the tables and graphs may not add up to 100% due to rounding or because respondents were able to give more than one answer to some questions. The base sizes shown in the tables and graphs use unweighted data (as the statistical reliability of results is determined by unweighted base sizes). The percentages in the tables and graphs use weighted data to ensure the survey results are representative of the population of interest.

Percentage figures for 'prefer not to say' options that are 1% or under are not presented in the charts.

Additional information

The survey included a number of questions specifically about age ratings, content warnings, and public perceptions about the Office. These provide an update on our regular five-yearly survey of New Zealanders' views about the classification system and their understanding of age ratings, and to track changes over time. Some of these findings are covered in this report, however, more detailed information will be made available on our website.[2]

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2   See the research page on our website: https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/resources/research/

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NEW ZEALANDERS SEE HARMFUL CONTENT, AND THEY'RE WORRIED ABOUT IT

"Everything you watch affects you."

MALE, NZ MĀORI AND NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 40–44

KEY FINDINGS

- **Most New Zealanders** are concerned about children and young people seeing harmful or inappropriate content in movies, shows and video games (74%), while 83% are concerned about content in other online spaces, such as social media.

- **Depictions of sexual violence or sexual harassment** (95%) and self-harm or suicide (94%) are seen as especially harmful, along with racist comments, behaviour or stereotypes (91%), and realistic violence (91%).

- **Most New Zealanders** (97%) believe that content in movies, shows and games can have a negative influence on children and young people's attitudes or emotional wellbeing in various ways. Around half think the influence on attitudes about violence (49%) and suicide or self-harm (47%) is mostly negative, while the majority (64%) think the influence on young people's emotional wellbeing or mental health can be both positive and negative.

- **It's common for New Zealanders** to see harmful content online. Just over half (53%) had seen online content that promotes or encourages harmful attitudes or behaviours, such as discrimination, terrorism or suicide.

In this section we explore New Zealanders' experiences and views about the impacts of content in movies, shows, video games, and other online spaces, such as social media. This includes participants' concerns about children and young people seeing harmful content, and perceptions about its influence on their attitudes and wellbeing. We also look at New Zealanders' personal experiences of seeing harmful content, and views about the impact on families, communities and wider society.

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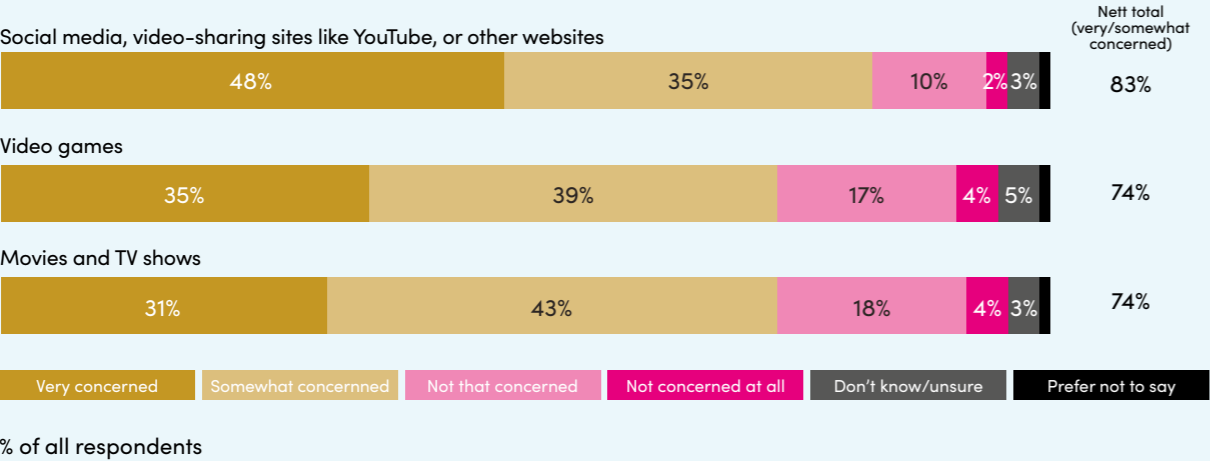Classification Office | June 2022

The impact on young people: New Zealanders' views

Most New Zealanders are concerned about what young people are watching

Concern about children and young people seeing harmful or inappropriate content was common, whether in movies and shows, video games, on social media or other websites. The great majority were 'very' or 'somewhat' concerned about video games (74%), and about movies and shows (74%), although participants were more likely to be 'very' concerned about content in video games.

Concern was greatest about harmful or inappropriate content in online spaces, such as social media, compared with more traditional entertainment media. Overall, 83% were concerned about this, and around half (48%) were 'very' concerned.

Overall, how concerned, if at all, are you about children and young people seeing harmful or inappropriate content in...?

Nett total (very/somewhat concerned)

Social media, video-sharing sites like YouTube, or other websites

| 48% | 35% | 10% | 2% | 3% | 83% |

Video games

| 35% | 39% | 17% | 4% | 5% | 74% |

Movies and TV shows

| 31% | 43% | 18% | 4% | 3% | 74% |

Very concerned | Somewhat concernned | Not that concerned | Not concerned at all | Don't know/unsure | Prefer not to say

% of all respondents

> "The two biggest ones are probably the spread of misinformation causing significant distrust from a lot of people I know, and kids at school developing really scary ideas about sex and relationships because of the way sex is often portrayed in movies and on TV."
>
> MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 17

Depictions of sexual violence, suicide or discrimination are seen as especially harmful

We asked participants about various types of content in movies, shows and games, and whether these might be harmful for children and young people to see. Most thought content like sexual violence (95%), sexual harassment (95%), and self-harm or suicide (94%) can be harmful, with large majorities agreeing these things could be 'very' harmful.

> "*13 Reasons Why* and other shows that display suicide/self-harm, these hit hard as it resonates with my own life."
>
> PARENT/CAREGIVER, FEMALE, NZ MĀORI, AGE 35–39

Most participants thought negative comments, behaviour or stereotypes about groups of people can be harmful. This includes content involving racism (91%), sexism (88%), and negative comments about gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people (85%).

The great majority thought sex and violence on screen can be harmful regardless of how these things are depicted in movies, shows and games. While participants were more likely to think 'realistic' violence can be harmful (91%), most also thought this about 'unrealistic' or 'fantasy' violence (78%). Likewise, large majorities thought that both 'explicit' sex scenes (90%) and 'implied' or 'non-explicit' sex scenes (71%) could be harmful.

> "Some violent scenes are very graphic and hard to unsee."
>
> FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 55–59

While less common, many were also concerned about depictions of nudity (59%), and swearing or offensive language (68%). Participants were also least likely to think these things can be 'very' harmful for children and young people to see.

Please tell us how harmful, or not, the following things might be for children and young people to see (in movies, shows and games)...?

91% Racism

95% Sexual harassment

68% Offensive language
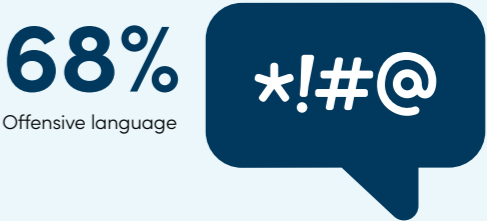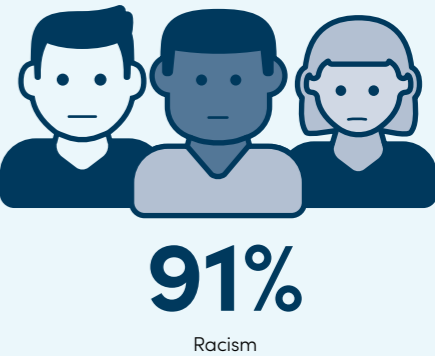
Figures show % of all respondents who thought different types of content can be 'very' or 'somewhat' harmful.

The influence of content on attitudes and wellbeing

We asked participants if they thought content in movies, shows and video games can influence children and young people. We provided a list of options about specific types of influence – for example, the influence on attitudes about violence, or about sex and relationships. On each topic, participants were asked whether the influence of content on young people (if any) was mostly positive, mostly negative, or both positive and negative.

97% think content in movies, shows and games can have some kind of negative influence on children and young people

Overall, the vast majority of New Zealanders (97%) believe that content in movies, shows and games can have a negative influence on children and young people's attitudes or emotional wellbeing in some way. However, many also see that such content can have a positive influence depending on context.

For some categories, participants tended to think the influence could be both positive and negative, including 'attitudes towards people who are different to them' (62%), 'emotional wellbeing or mental health' (64%), and 'attitudes about sex and relationships' (62%).
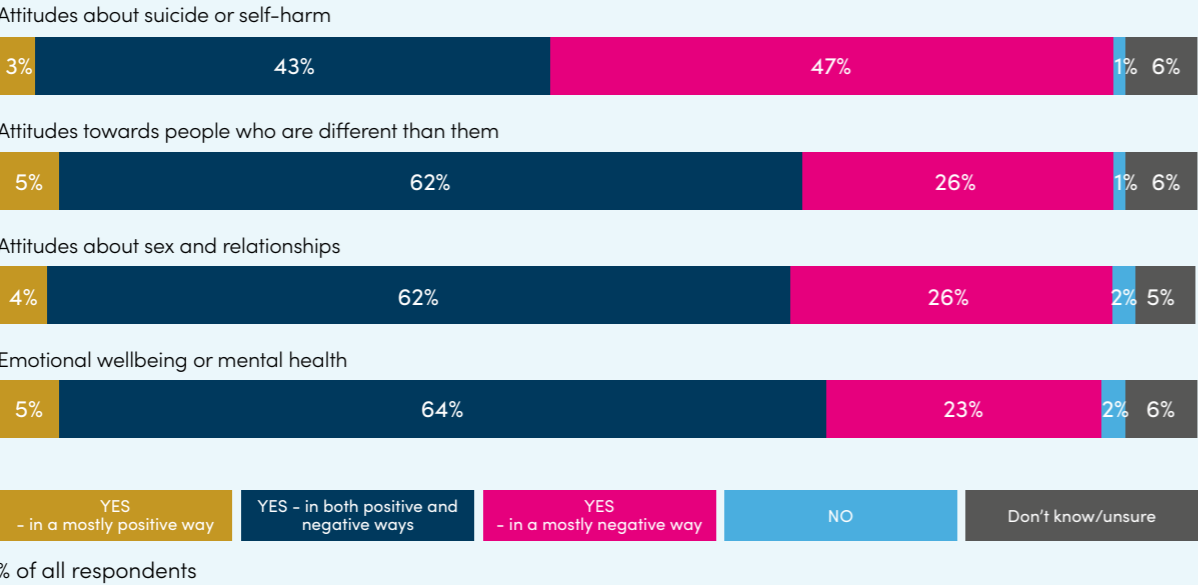
> "Suicide is portrayed as beautiful, and self-sacrificing. Not a permanent solution to a part-time problem. Suicide appears to be romantic and the reality is that it is destructive, and causes enormous emotional upheaval to all whānau members involved. It destroys the whānau and the community."
>
> NON-BINARY, NZ MĀORI, AGE 17

In others, participants were more likely to think the influence was mostly negative, including 'attitudes about violence' (49%), 'use of offensive or inappropriate language' (51%), and 'attitudes about suicide or self-harm' (47%). Across all categories, very few participants thought entertainment content had a mostly positive influence.

Do you think the content of movies, shows/TV series, and video games can influence children and young people's...?

Attitudes about suicide or self-harm
| 3% | 43% | 47% | 1% | 6% |

Attitudes towards people who are different than them
| 5% | 62% | 26% | 1% | 6% |

Attitudes about sex and relationships
| 4% | 62% | 26% | 2% | 5% |

Emotional wellbeing or mental health
| 5% | 64% | 23% | 2% | 6% |

- YES – in a mostly positive way
- YES – in both positive and negative ways
- YES – in a mostly negative way
- NO
- Don't know/unsure

% of all respondents

Movies and shows can help families talk about sensitive topics

Most participants (82%) agreed that movies and shows can provide opportunities to talk about difficult or sensitive topics with family or friends. This is consistent with results for the previous question, where many saw the potential for entertainment content to have a positive influence on younger audiences.

> "The content can provide a discussion point, particularly when looking at stereotypes or negative attitudes to people who are different to us. It tends to result in empathy towards the targeted group because our girls have a strong sense of fairness."
>
> PARENT/CAREGIVER, MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 55–59

> "More shows surrounding mental health has been good to have conversations on the topic and educate others on personal experiences and how these impact others."
>
> FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 20–24

> "I watched a series about teen suicide with my teenaged daughter. It provided an opportunity for good discussion."
>
> FEMALE, PACIFIC AND NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 50–54

> "A positive is that it can ignite family discussions about issues. Plus, raising awareness that such issues exist."
>
> FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 17

82% agree that movies and shows can provide opportunities to talk about difficult or sensitive topics

SURVEY QUESTION: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Movies and shows/TV series can provide opportunities to talk about difficult or sensitive topics with family or friends."

Figure shows % of all respondents who 'somewhat' or 'strongly' agree.

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It's common to see harmful content online

Content created by groups and individuals and shared online – from humorous memes to in-depth vlogs commenting on societal issues – is a rich source of entertainment, and a great way to learn about new ideas and engage with important issues. We also know that some online content has a greater potential for harm, not only to children and young people but society more generally. New Zealanders tend to agree. Earlier in this report we saw that participants tended to be significantly more concerned about content on social media, video-sharing sites or other websites, compared with commercial entertainment such as movies, shows and games.

We asked participants if they had seen any online content in the past year that promotes or encourages various attitudes or behaviours – such as hate or discrimination, terrorism or suicide. The following percentages are based on all respondents.

Just over half (53%) of New Zealanders had seen online content that, in their view, promotes or encourages at least one of these things.

36%
had seen online content that encourages division or mistrust between groups within society
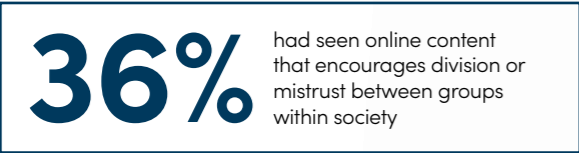
Around one in three participants had seen content that encourages 'division or mistrust between groups within society', and of the specific types of content listed this was the most common. This is a broad topic and participants may have been thinking of a wide variety of issues. For example, concern about division and mistrust came through strongly in our 2021 research on misinformation[3], and was often related to topics like COVID-19 or political discord in the United States.

It was common for participants to have seen online content that encourages some form of discrimination, with 40% selecting at least one of these options. This includes content that encourages 'misogyny or sexist attitudes about women and girls' (24%), and hate or discrimination based on things like 'race, culture, or religion' (31%) or 'sexuality or gender' (24%).

> "Seeing videos about cruelty towards animals, spreading misinformation about vaccines and violence towards others based on race and political discrimination made me feel angry and helpless."
>
> PARENT/CAREGIVER, FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 70–74

> "Homophobic stuff, anti-trans stuff, violence, cruelty to animals, etc. Just not a part of my mindset so watching any of these things is upsetting."
>
> MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 45–49

20%
had seen online content that encourages some form of self-harming behaviour

One in five (20%) had seen content that encourages some form of self-harming behaviour. This includes 'suicide' (13%), 'self-harm, eg cutting, burning' (10%), and 'eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia' (11%).

> "Accidentally saw a video of a religious murder/terrorist beheading which was pretty awful."
>
> PARENT/CAREGIVER, MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 45–49

33%
had seen online content that encourages violence towards others
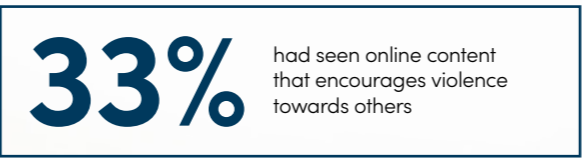
One in three (33%) had seen content that directly promotes or encourages violence towards others. This includes 'violence towards others based on things like race, culture, religion, sexuality or gender' (29%) and 'violent extremism or terrorism' (20%).

> "I remember when this guy killed himself on TikTok live. I was all over the place. My mum was really much stricter about what we were watching after that."
>
> FEMALE, NZ MĀORI, AGE 17

> "I have seen things that have affected me, or have triggered me with posts shared online. Some things like anorexia or self-harm are things I hope no children come across or learn to idolize/look up to."
>
> FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 20–24

These responses represent participants' subjective views, but it is clear that seeing various types of harmful content is a common experience for New Zealanders. This is consistent with findings covered later in this report where we explore the difficulty of avoiding harmful content online, and New Zealanders' personal experiences with content.
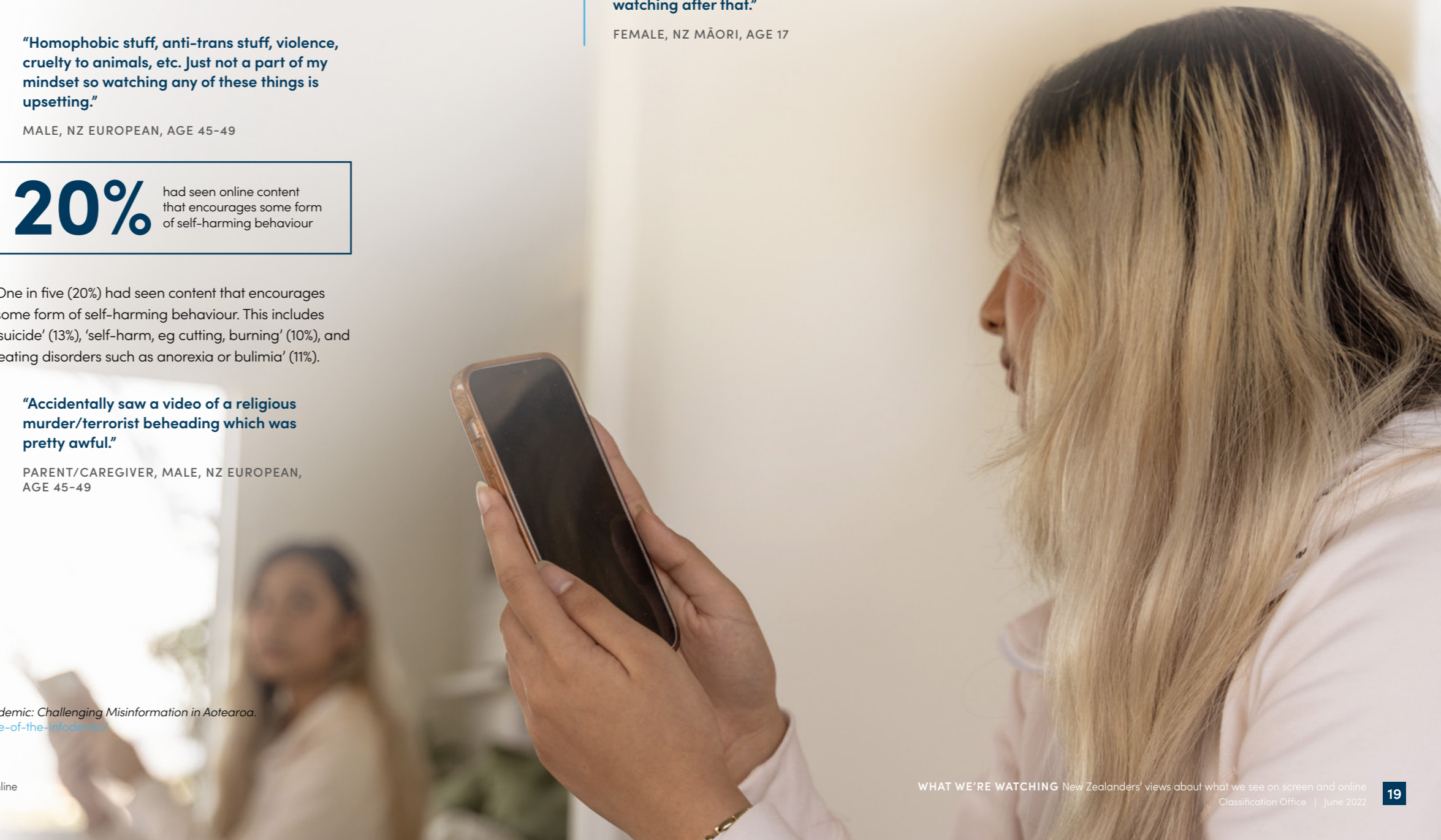
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3   Te Mana Whakaatu Classification Office. (2021). *The Edge of the Infodemic: Challenging Misinformation in Aotearoa.* https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/resources/research/the-edge-of-the-infodemic/

The impact on families and communities: New Zelanders' views

Movies, shows, games, social media and other online content can have real-world impacts on individuals and on society as a whole. These are sometimes positive, and sometimes not. This can affect everyone in different ways regardless of age or background, how they come across the content, or what people choose to watch themselves.

We gave participants the opportunity to tell us in their own words about how (if at all) content had affected their whānau or people in their community. We also asked if they had personally had negative experiences with content and gave them the opportunity to tell us more about this. In total we received over 600 responses to these questions.

A number of participants talked about content as being helpful for personal growth and providing insight into complex issues. Some also mentioned how content in movies, shows or documentaries can help families start conversations about sensitive topics.

However, it was much more common for participants to talk about their concerns about content and its impact. Some mentioned personal experiences that caused them significant distress or had a long-term impact on them. Others talked about the impacts on friends and loved ones, or their concerns about the impact on society as a whole.

The following quotes provide a snapshot of New Zealanders' views.

VIEWS ABOUT CONTENT IN MOVIES, SHOWS AND GAMES

"It made me feel scared and gave me nightmares."
MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 17

"I've been made to feel emotional and helpless by being reminded of human cruelty, torture and abuse."
FEMALE, NZ MĀORI AND NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 60–64

"Young teenagers, especially girls, can become influenced by social issues, eg eating issues, anxiety and depression hence the increase in mental health issues."
FEMALE, NZ MĀORI, AGE 65–69

"*13 Reasons Why* was just too much. There were graphic scenes and it was potentially triggering due to local events."
PARENT/CAREGIVER, FEMALE, NZ MĀORI AND NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 40–44

"The way sex is portrayed in movies and TV seems to have led to a lot of people at school thinking that sexual harassment and getting people drunk to have sex with them is okay."
MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 17

"*Once Were Warriors* was extremely distressing for me and another member of my whānau as it brought back hideous memories."
FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 75+

VIEWS ABOUT CONTENT IN ONLINE SPACES

"I am a school counsellor. Some of my clients are victims of such platforms; the impact can be massive. Self-esteem can be destroyed and anxiety takes over. The need to be liked or followed is immense."
FEMALE, NZ MĀORI, AGE 65–69

"I don't like seeing fights between any groups of people or animal cruelty. I feel sick when something pops up showing someone getting abused or really hurt when I know it is for real."
MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 65–69

"I used to use Instagram daily and there was so much crap on there that encouraged eating disorders, racism, sexism, the spread of misinformation and distrust, etc., that I stopped using it around six months ago. It sucks because none of my friends care about the stuff that's on there because we've become so normalised to it so they didn't switch to another app and I haven't spoken to some of them in months."
MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 17

"I'd like to point out that we don't get to choose how we look and where we are born so why people can't just get along is beyond me. It may be rooted in your upbringing and lack of understanding, which leads to conflicts."
MALE, ASIAN, AGE 30–34

"In the past my children have stumbled across something inappropriate while watching YouTube, such as something scary that will give them nightmares. So I am careful with what they watch to avoid this."
PARENT/CAREGIVER, FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 30–34

"Where do I start? There is so much misinformation around. I can't believe how people read and then believe whatever it is. The more they read the more the algorithms push it to them. It is wrong – they can't even see it happening."
FEMALE, NZ MĀORI AND NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 50–54

Insights: age, gender, ethnicity and other demographics

Content on screen and online affects all of us in some way. We found that people's experiences and views about potentially harmful content were broadly similar irrespective of age, gender or ethnicity.

In general, similarities in how participants felt about the issues covered in this report are much greater than the differences. Nonetheless, some significant differences and broad trends across groups do exist.

AGE

There was widespread concern about children and young people seeing harmful or inappropriate content across all age groups. Concern tended to rise with age, being somewhat less common among youth participants and young adults, and most common for people aged 60 and over. This was true for movies or shows, video games, or other online content. For example, 64% of 16 to 17 year olds were somewhat or very concerned about content in movies or shows, rising to 73% in relation to other online content, whereas the results for participants aged 70+ were 90% and 95%.

> **"I know that often in drama shows like *Euphoria,* the manipulative/unhealthy relationships can be really triggering for some of my friends with bad experiences in the past."**
>
> FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 17

There were some significant differences when looking at the potential harms of specific content. Results were similar for topics relating to discrimination or sexism, however, younger people aged 16 to 29 were less likely to think offensive language might be harmful (57%), compared with those aged 60 to 69 (81%) or 70+ (85%). Older participants were also more likely to think content involving self-harm or suicide might be very harmful, compared with young adults and people in their 30s. To a lesser extent, this pattern was similar for content like explicit sex, realistic violence or sexual violence. However, concern about these issues was very common regardless of age.

Overall, it was common for participants in all age groups to report seeing online content in the past year that promotes or encourages various attitudes or behaviours, such as hate or discrimination, terrorism or suicide. However, there were some important differences in the types of content participants said they had seen online in the past year.

> **"Anything around eating disorders is very triggering for me."**
>
> FEMALE, NZ MĀORI AND NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 25-29

> **"Watching a YouTube clip released of a real-time massacre really upset me."**
>
> MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 17

While still uncommon overall, it was significantly more likely for participants aged 16 to 29 to have seen content that encourages self-harming behaviour, particularly younger female participants. Seeing content promoting eating disorders was also significantly more common for younger people, especially younger female participants (24% of females aged 16 to 29 reported seeing this). Another important difference was in seeing content encouraging suicide – again, younger people were more likely to have seen this, particularly male participants.

GENDER

Concern about young people seeing harmful or inappropriate content was common regardless of gender. However, it was somewhat more common for female participants to express this view – and they were also more likely to be 'very concerned'. For example, 88% of female participants were concerned about online content, such as on social media, compared with 79% of males.

As with age, there were differences relating to the potential harms of specific types of content. This was most significant in opinions of whether content might be 'very' harmful. For example, female participants were more likely to think negative comments, behaviour or stereotypes might be very harmful involving racism (69% compared with 52% of males), sexism (61% compared with 41% of males), and about gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people (58% compared with 40% of males). These differences were also evident, but slightly less so, for content involving explicit sex and realistic violence, sexual violence and sexual harassment.

Views about the influence of content in movies, shows and games tended to be very similar regardless of gender, although it was somewhat more common for female participants to think there was a mostly negative influence on attitudes about violence (53% compared with 44% of males).

ETHNICITY

Concern about what tamariki and rangatahi see in movies, shows, social media or in other places online was very similar regardless of ethnicity, although it was somewhat less common for Asian participants to be 'very concerned' about content online, such as on social media.

Views about the potential harms of specific content tended to be similar overall, but there were some significant differences. For example, it was more common for Pacific participants to think offensive language and implied sex might be harmful.

Compared with other groups, it was more common for Māori participants to report seeing online content that promotes or encourages violence towards others due to characteristics like race, sexuality or gender, violent extremism or terrorism. It was also more common for Māori and Pacific participants to see content promoting hatred or discrimination based on race, culture and religion.

It was also somewhat more common (although still a small minority) for Māori participants to have seen content promoting suicide or self-harm. Broken down by age, it was more common for younger NZ European participants (16 to 29) to see content promoting violent extremism or terrorism, hatred or discrimination more broadly, or self-harm. It was also more common for younger Māori and NZ European participants to have seen content promoting suicide or eating disorders.

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MANAGING CONTENT HARMS – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In this section we explore New Zealanders' experiences and views about managing offensive and harmful content – for themselves and their whānau. This includes views about age ratings on movies, shows and games, parental controls, and dealing with harmful content they might come across themselves online. We also look at New Zealanders' views about how content is regulated, the role of official agencies, and what they think should be done to help keep young people safe from harmful content online.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Harmful online content** can be hard to avoid. This is a common experience for New Zealanders – 42% agreed it was hard for them to avoid seeing harmful or offensive content online, while 27% disagreed.

- **Most New Zealanders** (70%) agreed that it's hard to protect children from inappropriate or harmful online content, with 24% strongly agreeing with this.

- **New Zealanders think age ratings** are important when deciding what children and young people should watch. Of those who had recently helped to choose a movie, show or video game for a child or young person, most thought age ratings (84%) and content warnings (83%) were important.

- **Many lack confidence** in reporting harmful content. Most New Zealanders (74%) would consider reporting online content that was harmful, dangerous or illegal to an official agency in New Zealand. However, results showed a high level of uncertainty about how to go about reporting such content, or what the response would be.

- **New Zealanders lack confidence** in tech companies to keep them safe. Just 33% 'somewhat' or 'strongly' agreed that online platforms provide what people need to keep them safe. While some (27%) trusted social media sites to remove dangerous, violent or harmful content, more than half (51%) disagreed with this.

- **There is widespread support** among New Zealanders for regulating harmful content. However, just 43% 'somewhat' or 'strongly' agreed that the current system of media regulation in New Zealand is working well to keep young people safe from inappropriate or harmful content online.

"Spend an hour on TikTok and it would make you gasp knowing what children are watching."

MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 50–54

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Ways families manage

Most think it's hard to protect our kids online

> "The internet is a huge place to police so I think no matter how hard we try some things will still get through the cracks. I think social media needs to be 16+ even though I myself have let my older two have social media before 16, mainly due to peer pressure and not wanting them to be the only ones without it... it is a hard balance for a parent and hard to monitor once they have it."
>
> PARENT/CAREGIVER, FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 30–34

Most New Zealanders (70%) agree that it's hard to protect children from inappropriate or harmful online content, with 24% strongly agreeing. Asked about their own knowledge of online safety, a majority (61%) felt they personally know enough to help their whānau stay safe online, although just 16% strongly agreed with this statement.

> "It is difficult. My 11 year old asked me what a prostitute does when we were watching a movie. I was evasive in my answer so she googled it and came up with some fairly graphic websites, which I hope I have now blocked with the internet filter."
>
> PARENT/CAREGIVER, MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 55–59

New Zealanders' views about age ratings

Age ratings don't apply to most content online, but they're an important tool for New Zealanders concerned about children and young people viewing harmful or inappropriate content in movies, shows and games.

MOST THINK AGE RATINGS ARE IMPORTANT WHEN DECIDING WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD WATCH

Participants who had chosen or helped to choose a movie, show or video game for a child or young person in the last 12 months were asked about the importance of official age rating information. This group included 57% of all participants.

> "They are there for a reason. Developing brains, trauma, and nightmares ... unable to forget disturbing scenes. Just not appropriate."
>
> FEMALE, NZ MĀORI AND NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 40–44

Of this group, most thought age ratings (84%) and content warnings (83%) are important when making choices about what children and young people watch, giving a score of seven or above on a scale of ten. The majority thought age ratings and content warnings are very important, giving a rating of nine or ten on the scale.

> "It is useful guidance to minimise young generations normalising violence and bad behaviour."
>
> PARENT/CAREGIVER, MALE, ASIAN, AGE 55–59

> "Age range is a good indication of the movies I want to watch – for example, I wouldn't want to watch a movie that was rated 18 as I know it would be a movie that I did not want to see."
>
> FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 40–44

Age rating information is also important for some when choosing what to watch or play themselves. Over a third (35%) of all participants thought the age rating was important, and 39% thought this about the content warning.

> "I'm okay with it. It helps my dad as he is scared of violence so it helps him more I think."
>
> MALE, PACIFIC, AGE 17

Keeping whānau safe online

It is hard to protect children from inappropriate or harmful online content

| 24% | 46% | 14% | 9% | 2% | 5% | Nett total (strongly/some-what agree) 70% |

I feel I know enough to help my family/whānau stay safe online

| 16% | 45% | 22% | 9% | 2% | 6% | 61% |

Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree or disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know/unsure

SURVEY QUESTION:
"How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements...?"
% of all respondents

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Awareness of ratings on streaming services

A recent law change means major online streaming providers are required to display New Zealand age ratings on their movies and shows, similar to what you see on DVDs or in cinemas[4].

Our survey was conducted during a period of change where various streaming services were implementing these new requirements. With this in mind, it was encouraging to find that New Zealanders are already noticing the changes. Of those who use the two most popular streaming services, a majority had seen these ratings on Netflix (57%) and Disney+ (52%). It was somewhat less common for participants using other streaming services to have noticed the age ratings (ranging from 37% to 49%), although we expect that awareness of age ratings will increase over time as the system is bedded in. We will be tracking developments with further research.

Use of parental controls for streaming services

Parental controls can provide additional safeguards for parents to help ensure their children aren't watching inappropriate or harmful content. New requirements to display official age ratings mean that online streaming services for movies and shows can now link official New Zealand age ratings to their parental control functions.

> **"Mostly scary movies will stick in my kids' minds, more so than anything else. These are what I look out for when choosing a movie for them."**
>
> PARENT/CAREGIVER, FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 40–44

> **"Useful to stop younger children watching things they are not ready for."**
>
> PARENT/CAREGIVER, MALE, NZ MĀORI, AGE 25–29

Parents and caregivers who use streaming services were asked about the use of parental controls in their homes. Over half of parents and caregivers with children and young people at home (53%) said they or someone in their household uses parental controls for streaming services. Around a third of parents said they did not use parental controls, and 11% were unsure.

Over half of parents/caregivers, currently use parental controls for online streaming services

No 36%
Don't know /unsure 11%
Yes 53%
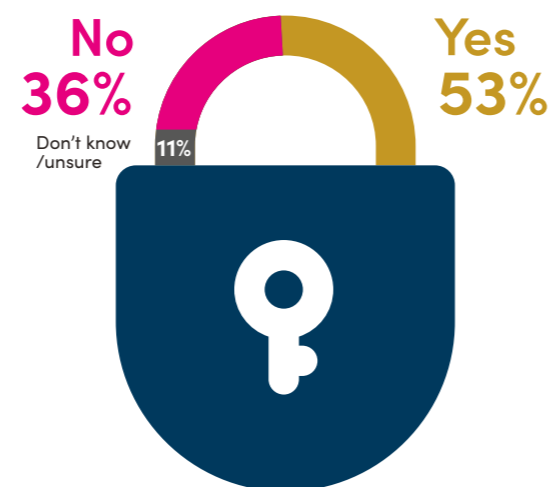
SURVEY QUESTION: "Some subscription or pay-per-view online streaming services have parental control settings to prevent children and young people from watching inappropriate movies or shows. Do you or someone in your household currently use these parental controls?"

% of all respondents who use online streaming services and have parental/caregiving responsibilities.

Parents and caregivers who did not use parental controls were asked to tell us more about this, and their reasons were varied. The most common responses were that adults in the household always monitor what children and young people watch (41%), that they trusted children and young people in their household to choose appropriate movies and shows (18%), or that they would only use these for younger children (17%). However, some weren't sure how to set up parental controls (12%), others didn't think they were effective (6%) or weren't aware of them (7%).

> **"I'm in favour of having age ratings on all products you've mentioned – it does give a parent or grandparent an idea of what it contains and what it's about, so as to be informed, and then we can make our choice whether to watch it, let others watch it, or not."**
>
> FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN/EUROPEAN, AGE 60–64

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4   You can learn more about how the system works on our website: https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/news-items/streaming-providers-are-now-required-to-display-nz-ratings/

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VIEWS ON RESTRICTED RATINGS AND PARENTAL CHOICE

"It would be incredibly difficult to police if age restrictions were a legal requirement for in home viewing."

FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 25–29

"A lot of it depends on the nature of the movie and family values."

MALE, NZ MĀORI AND NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 70–74

"They are good as guidelines but there is no need to make people criminals."

PARENT/CAREGIVER, MALE, AGE 35–39

"If the rating is R18 or R16 then it has been selected for a reason – why have it if people under these age limits are going to be allowed to watch?"

MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 40–44

Under the current system, it's illegal to let an underage person watch a movie or show with a restricted age rating (like R16 or R18), even if they're accompanied by a parent or guardian. This applies to content on streaming services if an official age rating has been issued by the Classification Office for that content[5].

We asked participants for their views about legal restrictions that may apply in this area. Only 22% of participants thought it should simply be illegal for parents to let their underage child or teen watch age-restricted movies or shows on a streaming service.

By contrast, 42% thought parents should be able to decide if their child watches age-restricted content on a streaming service, either by giving permission (18%) or watching it with their child (24%).

Some (26%) thought there should be no legal restriction at all, and that the ratings should only offer guidance.

New Zealanders are more evenly split about whether children and young people should be able to watch restricted movies in cinemas.
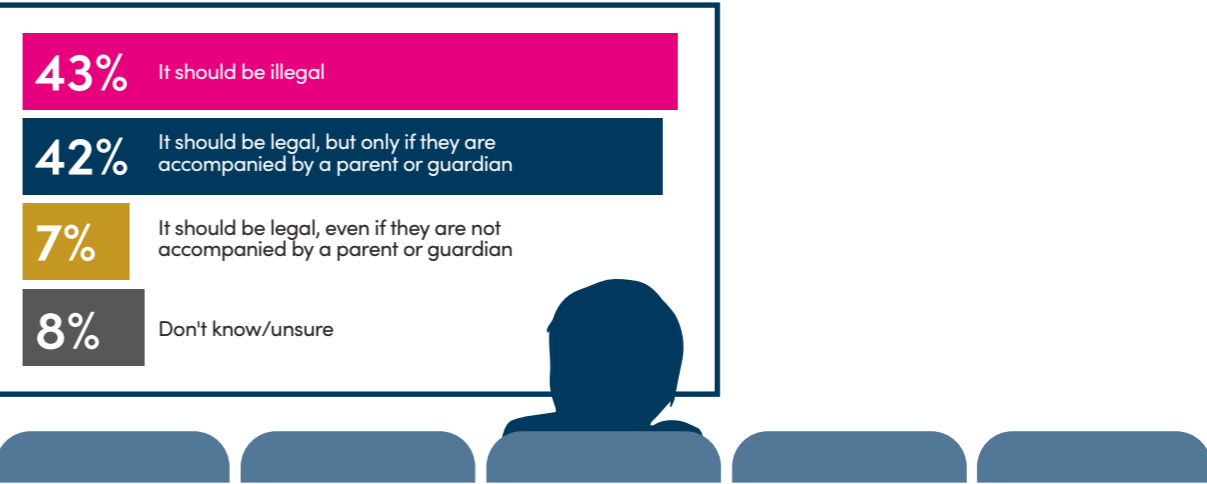
Some participants thought this should be against the law (43%) and a similar number said it should be allowed if accompanied by a parent or guardian (42%). However, just 7% believed there should be no legal restriction at all.

Underage people watching age-restricted movies/shows on an online streaming service

22% It should be illegal

24% It should be legal, but only if the child/teen is watching it with a parent or guardian

18% It should be legal, but only if the child/teen has permission from a parent or guardian to watch it

26% Age ratings should not be legal restrictions, they should be for guidance only

9% Don't know /unsure

SURVEY QUESTION: This question is about subscription or pay-per-view online streaming services (eg Netflix or Google Play Movies). "Do you think it should be legal or illegal for parents to let their underage child or teen watch an age-restricted (eg R16 or R18) movie or show on an online streaming service?"

% of all respondents

Underage people watching age-restricted movies in a cinema

43% It should be illegal

42% It should be legal, but only if they are accompanied by a parent or guardian

7% It should be legal, even if they are not accompanied by a parent or guardian

8% Don't know/unsure

SURVEY QUESTION: "Do you think it should be legal or illegal for an underage person to watch an age-restricted (eg R16 or R18) movie in a cinema?"

% of all respondents
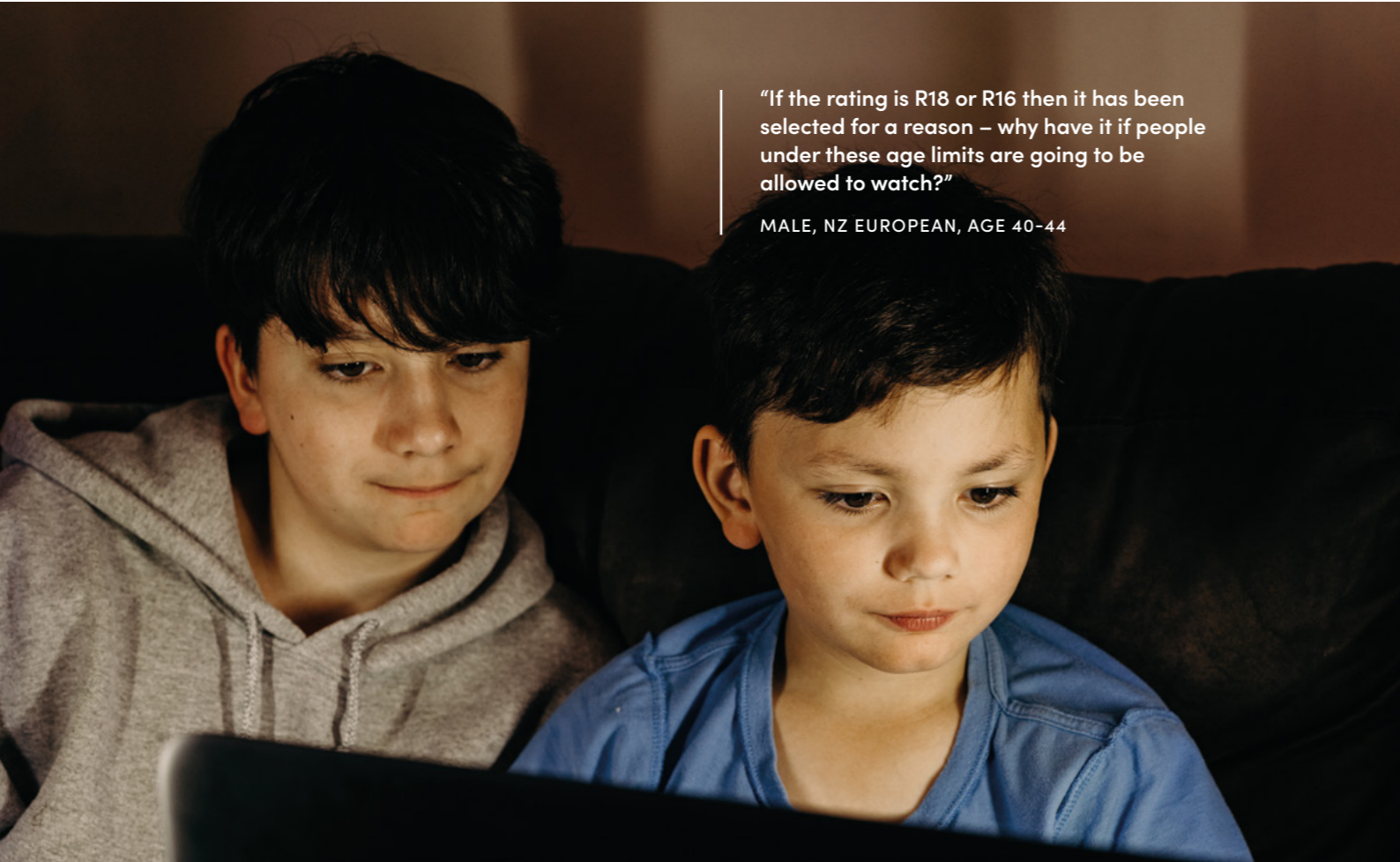
5   Learn more about classification labels on our website: https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/classification-info/classification-labels/

Keeping safe is a challenge for many

## Harmful online content can be hard to avoid

> "Didn't like what I was seeing so left that site and tried not to think further about it."

MALE, NZ EUROPEAN/EUROPEAN, AGE 17

> "I usually just don't click on links or read a little then stop if it contains topics I find offensive. It upsets me that people feel they can express such things online and try to recruit others to their 'team'. Sometimes it makes me angry."

FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 50-54

> "The internet has very little safety surrounding photos/videos of crime scenes. I have on multiple occasions seen dead bodies and very gruesome crime scenes."

MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 16

It's not just about children and young people – difficulty in avoiding harmful or offensive content online is a common experience for New Zealanders. We found that 42% 'somewhat' or 'strongly' agreed it was hard for them to avoid seeing this type of content, while 27% disagreed.

This reflects findings covered earlier in this report (see page 18), showing more than half of New Zealanders had seen content online that promotes or encourages harmful attitudes or behaviours such as discrimination, violence or self-harming behaviour. It is also consistent with findings in the next section, which looks at negative experiences with content New Zealanders have seen online in the past year.
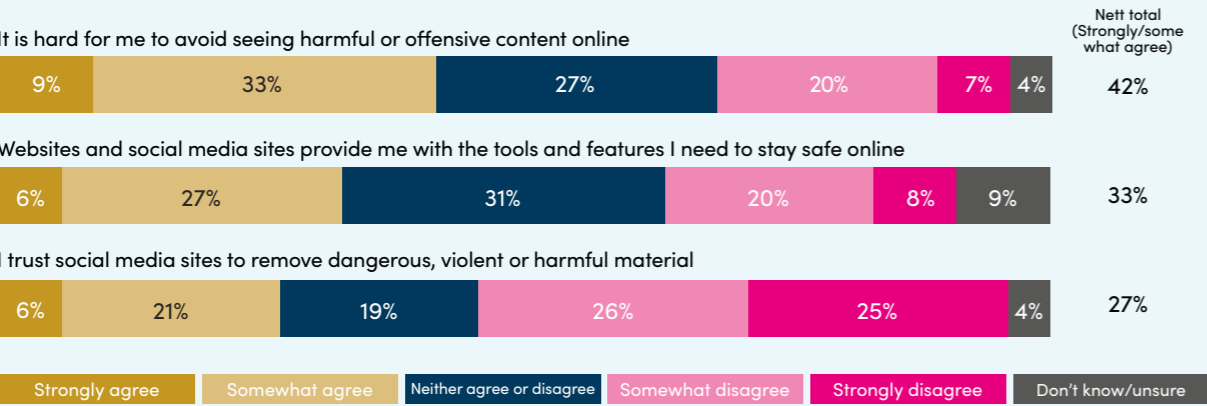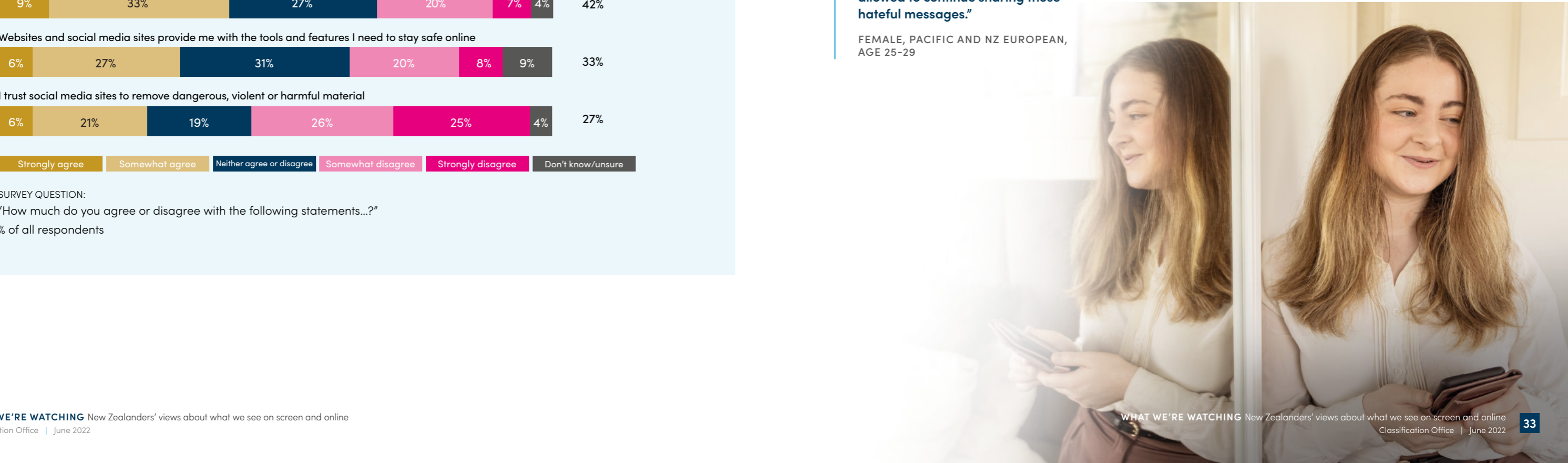
New Zealanders lack confidence in tech companies to keep them safe

New Zealanders are evenly split about whether websites and social media sites provide them with the tools and features they need to stay safe online, but our survey results indicated a widespread lack of confidence. One in three (33%) 'somewhat' or 'strongly' agreed that online platforms provide what people need to keep them safe, while 28% disagreed. Results also indicated a high level of uncertainty about this, with 31% neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement, and 9% being unsure.

Relatively few New Zealanders trust social media sites to remove dangerous, violent or harmful content. While around one in four (27%) agreed with this, more than half (51%) disagreed. As with the previous statement, a number of participants were uncertain about this, and 19% neither agreed nor disagreed.

> "It was frustrating that on social media you can only report bullying/hate speech and leave it to the moderators to sort out. A lot of the times it comes back saying it does not violate their terms and conditions and people are allowed to continue sharing these hateful messages."

FEMALE, PACIFIC AND NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 25-29

Many lack confidence in reporting harmful content

Many New Zealanders would consider reporting online content that was harmful, dangerous or illegal to an official agency in New Zealand (such as an official complaints organisation or a law enforcement agency). This includes 27% who said they would be likely to report such content, while a further 47% said they might consider doing so.

We asked a follow-up question about why people might not report this type of content to an official agency, and provided a list of options. This question was asked to those who said they would 'possibly' report harmful content, those who 'would not' report this content, and those who were unsure.

Our findings showed a high level of uncertainty about how to go about reporting content, or what the response would be. Of this group, 42% said they wouldn't know how to report it, or who to report it to. Some did not think official agencies could do anything about it (18%), and some did not trust official agencies to take effective action (15%).

One in four (24%) said they wouldn't feel comfortable getting involved, while 27% said this was the responsibility of websites or tech companies.

Keeping ourselves safe online

It is hard for me to avoid seeing harmful or offensive content online

| 9% | 33% | 27% | 20% | 7% | 4% | 42% |

Websites and social media sites provide me with the tools and features I need to stay safe online

| 6% | 27% | 31% | 20% | 8% | 9% | 33% |

I trust social media sites to remove dangerous, violent or harmful material

| 6% | 21% | 19% | 26% | 25% | 4% | 27% |

Nett total (Strongly/somewhat agree)

Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree or disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know/unsure

SURVEY QUESTION:
"How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements...?"
% of all respondents

New Zealanders support regulation of harmful content

Government agencies currently play a variety of roles in mitigating the negative impacts of potentially harmful content. Most New Zealanders support this approach.

Support for an official role

In asking for participants' views about Te Mana Whakaatu – Classification Office, we asked whether it is worthwhile and useful for an organisation in New Zealand to do things such as deciding age ratings, classifying potentially illegal content, and providing guidance and resources about content.

Results revealed strong support among New Zealanders for the work we do. The great majority (89%) thought it is useful for an organisation to carry out this work, including 62% who thought it was 'very useful'. While just 6% saw it as 'not that useful' or 'not at all useful'.
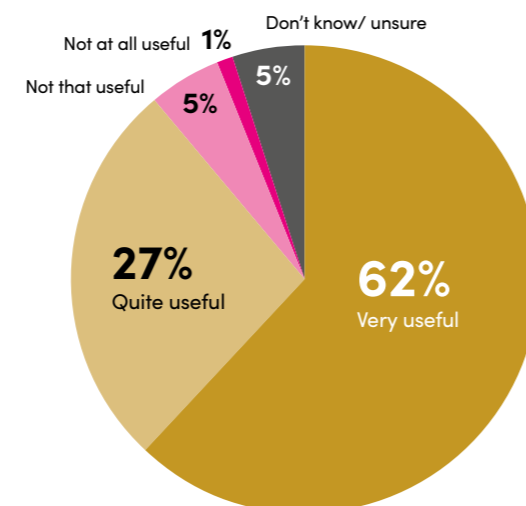
Views about the current system

We asked about media regulation and legal safeguards around online content in New Zealand, noting that various agencies and organisations play a role in the regulation of things such as entertainment content, online safety, and dealing with harmful or illegal content of various kinds.

Results suggested that the current systems in place aren't fit for purpose in a media content environment that has changed dramatically in recent decades. Fewer than half of New Zealanders (43%) 'somewhat' or 'strongly' agree that the current system of media regulation in New Zealand is working well to keep young people safe from inappropriate or harmful content online. Just 8% strongly agree.
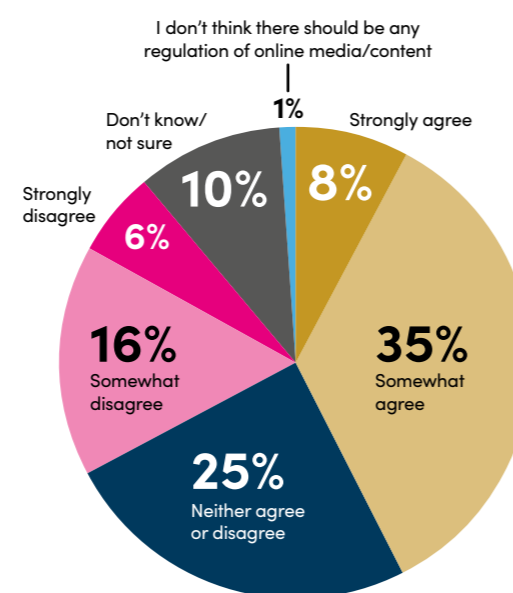
Overall, there appears to be widespread support for some form of regulatory oversight. Given the option, just 1% indicated they 'don't think there should be any regulation of online media/content', and this reflects findings in the previous section showing strong support for services currently provided by the Office.

Usefulness of a classification agency/ media regulator

Not at all useful **1%**

Don't know/ unsure

Not that useful **5%**

5%

27%
Quite useful

62%
Very useful

SURVEY QUESTION: "Overall, do you think it is worthwhile /useful that there is an organisation doing these sorts of things in New Zealand?"
% of all respondents

Views about content regulation

I don't think there should be any regulation of online media/content **1%**

Don't know/ not sure **10%**

Strongly agree **8%**

Strongly disagree **6%**

16%
Somewhat disagree

35%
Somewhat agree

25%
Neither agree or disagree

SURVEY QUESTION: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The current system of media regulation in New Zealand is working well to keep young people safe from inappropriate or harmful content online."
% of all respondents

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What more should be done?

Participants were given the opportunity to tell us in their own words about what more could be done to help keep themselves and their family/whānau safe online.

In total we received more than 200 responses to this question, and a few major themes emerged.

The need for more and better regulation or government action: The most common response was in support of government action and more effective regulation. Relatively few participants talked about age ratings or restrictions on content like movies or shows, rather, the pressing issue for most was about social media and other online content. Some talked about tougher measures to hold tech companies to account, and others about legal requirements for online age restrictions.

The need for more and better education, information and support: Many responses highlighted the importance of education for young people in schools, and also for better information to help adults and caregivers navigate these challenging issues.

> "I think social media is a huge platform which is hard to monitor."
>
> FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 25–29

> "There needs to be a dedicated Crown entity for this, or an existing agency given powers to do this."
>
> MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 25–29

> "More regulation on online platforms. I think TV and movie classification is about right but not social media platforms."
>
> MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 55–59

> "It needs to be somehow filtered and regulated...this being content that is extreme."
>
> MALE, PACIFIC AND NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 50–54

> "Stronger laws holding the people who create and share the content to account."
>
> FEMALE, NZ MĀORI AND NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 25–29

> "More education for us young people, plus our parents."
>
> FEMALE, NZ MĀORI, AGE 17

> "Having a kōrero about what is harmful. If it is unavoidable (such as children saw something on TV, eg the news, about something not suitable), use that opportunity to discuss what is respectable behaviour."
>
> PARENT/CAREGIVER, FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 50–54

> "Realistically, it is up to the parents to control and monitor what their children are playing/viewing/seeing up to a certain age... At the end of the day you cannot always prevent children from being exposed to unwanted and unsuitable material – you can only make sure that you answer any questions they have clearly and understandably, and be vigilant."
>
> FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 60–64

The need for more and better technical solutions, tools or support: Technical solutions, such as online age verification or filters, were mentioned by a number of participants. Some thought there should be legal requirements for using online safety tools such as filters, while others thought more should be done to make it easier for people to use the tools already available.

> "More info on helping manage access to potentially inappropriate content – a lot of this is technical in nature ('how to') so not necessarily the role of a government agency. But seriously it is f*cking difficult to manage children's access to content across multiple platforms (as well as access itself, across multiple devices). I'm relatively IT savvy and find it hard to manage."
>
> PARENT/CAREGIVER, MALE, OTHER ETHNICITY, AGE 45–49

The importance of the role of parents: A number of participants mentioned that dealing with online safety and harmful content is ultimately the responsibility of parents. For some this was in the context of making parents' lives easier by providing better information and support.

> "I think keeping family and whānau safe should be done by family and whānau monitoring and limiting use of devices where appropriate."
>
> FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 60–64

The need for tech/social media companies to do more: Some also called for social media or other tech companies to take further action to ensure they're keeping users safe, although some expressed a lack of trust in these companies to take effective action.

> "I think platforms need to be more proactive in monitoring content and removing it."
>
> FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 50–54

> "Making it more important that sites teach you how to report or block unwanted content or messages. My younger sister had no idea how to report inappropriate content she was getting sent, she had to Google it. So maybe in the tutorials on how to use the app they put in how to block/report and keep themselves safe on the app."
>
> FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 20–24

> "Overseas social media platforms need to be held accountable for the content on their platforms."
>
> MALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 30–34

Insights: age, gender, ethnicity and other demographics

Managing content harms – whether for ourselves or our whānau – can be a challenge for many New Zealanders. Overall, we found that people tend to share similar views and concerns regardless of characteristics such as age, gender or ethnicity. As with the previous insights section, we did find some significant differences across demographic groups, and we've highlighted these below.

AGE

Younger participants were more likely to agree that 'it is hard for me to avoid seeing harmful or offensive content online'. A majority (53%) of those aged 16 to 29 either 'somewhat' or 'strongly' agreed with this statement.

Those aged 18 to 29 were less likely to think age ratings (21%) and content warnings (27%) were important when making personal choices about what to watch, but views about this were otherwise broadly similar across different age groups. Asked about choosing movies, shows or games for children or young people, the importance of age ratings was high across all age groups but tended to rise with age. Of those we asked, 75% of 16 to 17 year olds thought age ratings were important, while 97% of people aged 70+ thought this. Young adults aged 18 to 29 were also less likely than other age groups to support full legal age restrictions on streaming services (12%), and in cinemas (29%).

GENDER

Difficulty avoiding harmful or offensive online content is a common problem, and there was little difference between male and female participants when asked about this. Likewise, a similar proportion of male (67%) and female (73%) participants agreed that it's hard to protect children from inappropriate or harmful online content.

Of those we asked, most thought age ratings were important when choosing a movie, show or video game for a child or young person. Female participants were somewhat more likely to think age ratings were important (89%) than males (79%). There was a bigger difference when asking about the importance

of content warnings such as 'violence' or 'offensive language' – 90% of female participants answering this question thought the content warning was important, while this was less common for males (77%).

ETHNICITY

Pacific (52%) and Asian (50%) participants were more likely to agree that harmful or offensive content is hard to avoid online, compared with NZ European participants (40%). Pacific participants (39%) were also more likely than Māori (32%), Asian (27%) or NZ Europeans (26%) to say they would be likely to report harmful or illegal online content to an official agency.

Asked if they 'feel I know enough to help my family/ whānau stay safe online', Māori (24%) participants were somewhat more likely than non-Māori to 'strongly agree', but overall agreement with this statement was similar for different groups.

Confidence in social media companies was more common amongst Asian participants, who were more likely to trust social media sites to remove dangerous, violent or harmful material (37%), and to think websites and social media sites provided the tools and features needed to stay safe online (44%).

Participants who had recently helped choose a movie, show or video game for a child or young person were asked about the importance of age ratings. Responses tended to be similar across different ethnic groups, however, Māori participants were more likely to think age ratings are very important (giving a score of 9 or 10 on the scale provided). When asked about choosing movies, shows or games for themselves, Asian (53%) and Pacific (48%) participants were more likely than Māori (36%) and NZ Europeans (30%) to think the age rating is important.

Asked about legal restriction on what children and young people can watch, Māori participants were more likely to think age ratings on streaming services should be for guidance only (33%), and to think underage people should be able to watch a restricted movie in a cinema if accompanied by a parent or guardian (49%).

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CONCLUSIONS: the harms are real, and we need to take action

> **"Social media sites themselves should be held more accountable."**
>
> FEMALE, NZ EUROPEAN, AGE 70-74

New Zealanders think harmful content on screen and online is a real problem, whether for themselves, their loved ones, or the wider community. Concerns about our tamariki and rangatahi are widespread, but this isn't just a problem for children and young people. Harmful or offensive content can be hard to avoid at any age, and what people see can have a real impact on their own wellbeing. In one way or another, we're all affected.

This report focuses on the experience and views of New Zealanders, but the problem is global in nature.

The recent change to New Zealand's classification law for commercial online streaming services is an important step towards mitigating harms around content, and providing consistent information for families when making choices about what to watch. However these services represent a small proportion of online content as a whole – the great majority of which is not subject to effective safeguards.

The reality for New Zealanders – including our rangatahi – is that much of the material they see online is provided by global social media platforms. These large online platforms have taken significant steps to address issues around harmful content on their services in recent years, such as by taking actions to address the spread of misinformation or extremist content. However, these measures remain highly variable and often ineffective. This is reflected in our own findings about New Zealanders' relatively low levels of trust in social media companies to take sufficient measures to ensure the safety of users and to remove harmful or dangerous content.

There's no easy or simple solution, and a number of participants talked about the difficulty of tackling such a broad and complex set of problems. This doesn't mean nothing can be done. Countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and Germany are taking significant steps to address online content harms – from limiting children and young people's access to pornography, to combatting the spread of extremist propaganda. New Zealand is currently undertaking a wide-ranging review of content regulation, and this a key opportunity to learn from overseas developments and ensure we have a system that works to ensure the safety and wellbeing of New Zealanders[6].

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6   See NZ Department of Internal Affairs website for more information: https://www.dia.govt.nz/media-and-online-content-regulation

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