The State of the Online Nation

Netsafe has undertaken a study to better understand the community's awareness towards online safety. The State of the Online Nation study is being released to coincide with the start of the country's first dedicated online safety week taking place between 26-30 July 2021.

According to *The State of the Online Nation*, the majority of people are positive about the overall impact of the internet on their lives (71%) and confident in their personal ability to manage online safety challenges (60%). However, we believe the internet has become more dangerous (68%) and will continue to do so (52%).

This pessimism is underscored by personal experience, with 52 percent of us have personally faced an online safety challenge – and achieving relatively low rates of success when reporting bad behaviours (33%).

Parents reported good levels of knowledge about their children's lives online (63%) and the risks they faced (69%). However, a higher percentage of people believe the impact of the internet on young people is negative (46%) than positive (29%). This concern for young people is reflected in the online safety interventions rated as likely to impact online safety significantly.

Included in this report is information about:

- Views on the current and future state of safety online
- Experiences of online safety challenges and resolutions
- Levels of confidence and proactive activity
- Knowledge and views on the law as it applies online
- Preferred activities to improve online safety outcomes
- Digital parenting activities

Part One: Views on the current and future state of safety online

POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?

Respondents used a seven-point scale to consider the impact of the internet and digital technologies on themselves personally and on young people, considering the balance between positive effects and negative experiences.

Scale	Personally	On young people
1 Entirely negative		1
2	1	10
3	5	36
4 Neutral	23	24
5	33	20
6	32	9
7 Entirely positive	5	1

OPTIMISTIC OR PESSIMISTIC?

Respondents were asked to rate the dangerousness of the internet compared to 2016 and to make a prediction of the future in 2026. Sixty-eight percent believe the internet has become more dangerous, and 52 percent think it will worsen.

Scale	2016 – 2021	2021 – 2026
Much more dangerous	8	15
More dangerous	60	37
The same	18	28
Safer	12	17
Much safer	2	3

Part Two: Experiences of online safety challenges and resolution

CHALLENGES

Fifty-two percent of respondents experienced at least one of the challenges listed below. People that had experienced that challenge were asked if they had spent time resolving that challenge – and if so, how much time.

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Online safety issue	Experienced in last year	Attempted resolution	Time spent attempting resolution (hours)
Been exposed to offensive and unwanted content on social media or content sharing platforms	23	54	1
Had offensive and unwanted content sent to you by another person	16	65	2
One of your devices getting malware (viruses)	15	90	3
Technology was used to locate you (by somebody you did not want to)	11	54	2
Received and then passed on information that you later become aware was false	10		
Been the target of bullying or harassment	7	69	3
Got far enough into a scam situation to lose money or personal data	6	80	3
Been the target of aggression or hate speech online due to your colour, race, ethnic or national origins, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability	5	66	2.1
Had personal or sensitive information (other than intimate images or video) about you shared on the internet	3	56	5.3
Had intimate (nude or nearly nude) images or video of you shared without your consent	2	77	3.7

SEEKING SUPPORT

Respondents were asked if, in the last year, they had reported bad behaviour or content to an online platform, or to a third party or agency, such as Netsafe, CERT New Zealand or the Department of Internal Affairs. Of those who had, they were asked if they achieved their desired outcome.

Channel	Yes	No	Unsure
Online platform	33	24	43
Third-party such as Netsafe	53	20	27

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Part Three: Levels of confidence, proactive activity

PERSONAL CONFIDENCE MANAGING ONLINE SAFETY

Most respondents were confident in their ability to manage online safety challenges.

Scale	Confidence
1 Not at all confident	2
2	3
3	11
4 Neutral	25
5	32
6	21
7 Extremely confident	7

PROACTIVE ONLINE SAFETY

There is a range of things people can do to have safer online experiences. The study found the most popular were updating passwords (64%) and reviewing and updating privacy and security settings (57%).

Action	Total	Male	Female
Updated old (existing) passwords to be stronger	64	59	68
Reviewed and updated privacy and security settings on at least one social media or content sharing platform	57	52	63
Did some research on or about a business before choosing to purchase from them (or not)	56	51	60
Chose not to post something on social media or a content sharing platform due to a safety or privacy concern	49	40	56
Blocked or "unfriended" a person because of their behaviour towards you	36	32	39
Used an online platform's reporting system to report bad behaviour or content	27	23	31
Informed a friend or family member that they were spreading misinformation	18	19	16
Deleted an account on a social media or content sharing platform because of concerns about safety or privacy	17	19	16

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Reported a person or content to a third-party agency in New Zealand (such as the police, Netsafe, Department of Internal Affairs etc.)	8	6	9

Part Four: Knowledge and views about the law

KNOWLEDGE OF THE HARMFUL DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS ACT

Respondents were asked: "Did you know that New Zealand has a set of online safety laws that are designed to help protect New Zealanders from online harm?"

Yes	No	Unsure
55	30	16

Laws in New Zealand, including the Harmful Digital Communications Act, make it an offence to use digital communication to harm others. The following table reflects the knowledge of, and support for, online behaviours being illegal.

Offence	Illegal but shouldn't be	Illegal and should be	Not illegal but should be	Not illegal but shouldn't be
Outing someone without permission (e.g., disclosing sexual orientation)*	6	26	50	18
Posting messages that are threatening, intimidating, or menacing*	6	61	28	5
Posting messages that a reasonable person would consider grossly offensive*	6	25	49	20
Communication that is indecent or obscene*	7	44	38	12
Harassing or stalking someone on the internet*	5	55	34	5
Making a false allegation*	7	31	48	15
Posting messages that are in breach of confidence (e.g., subject to name suppression)*	10	69	17	4
Inciting or encouraging someone to harm themselves or someone else*	5	69	23	3
Inciting or encouraging someone to commit suicide*	4	75	18	3
Abusing someone because of colour, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability*	5	62	27	6

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Consensually sharing an intimate image or video of yourself with someone else or posting it online	6	19	26	49
Sharing an intimate Image of someone else without permission*	5	60	31	4
Sharing someone else's personal details (e.g., address or phone number) without permission	7	38	46	9
Posting fake news to see who falls for it	5	11	53	30
Creating a fake profile online, pretending to be someone else	7	22	52	19
Sharing your opinion that most people would not agree with, but would not be deemed offensive or abusive by a reasonable person	6	9	14	71
Downloading an app on your partner's phone without their knowledge so you can track their location*	6	21	57	16
Watching a video of someone committing a terrorist attack that has been classified in NZ as objectionable material (e.g., Christchurch Mosque shooting)*	10	65	18	7

* Illegal

Part Five: Activities to improve online safety outcomes

The following changes or activities were rated for their likely impact on online safety outcomes in New Zealand. The responses reflect concerns about the safety of young people, and recognition online safety relies heavily on informed consumers.

Activity or initiative	Likely to have a significant positive impact
More online safety taught in New Zealand schools	79
More information for parents and carers about online safety	71
Double the law enforcement resources for fighting cyber crime	66
More public awareness campaigns about online safety Issues	65

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Stronger laws in New Zealand against online hate speech	61
A filter that blocks illegal content at a national level	60
Stronger laws in New Zealand against deliberately spreading misinformation online	58
Expanding the scope of the Harmful Digital Communications Act to include indirect harm to individuals and groups	55
An industry code that local and international social media and content hosts sign up to defining expected online safety actions	57
A national strategy on online safety	57
Establish an online safety portfolio (i.e., Minister of Online Safety)	45

Part Six: Digital parenting

Parents were asked to respond to a series of statements about managing internet use and behaviour in the home. These questions are structured around the approach promoted through Netsafe's *Online Safety Parent Toolkit*.

The majority say they understand the risks young people face and are confident of knowing how their children were using devices.

Action	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
Good knowledge of risks young people face while using the internet	2	10	19	53	17
Confident of knowing what their child is doing online and the services they are using	2	14	21	47	16
Parent has explored with their child's online world with them	1	14	27	42	15
Parent has reached clear agreement with their child about where they can go online and what they can do	1	9	25	45	21

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Parent feels their child has a good baseline knowledge to manage online safety	6	16	25	43	10
Parent would be happy if their child behaved online as they do	2	9	21	47	21
Family knows what to do if something goes wrong	2	14	24	50	11

Part Seven: Methodology

This research was conducted by Kantar (Colmar Brunton) on behalf of Netsafe. It comprises data from 808 people in New Zealand aged over 18. The survey sampled people from all regions, ethnicities, religions and age groups.

Respondents were surveyed between 1 – 12 July 2021. All figures in this report are stated in percentages unless specified otherwise.

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