

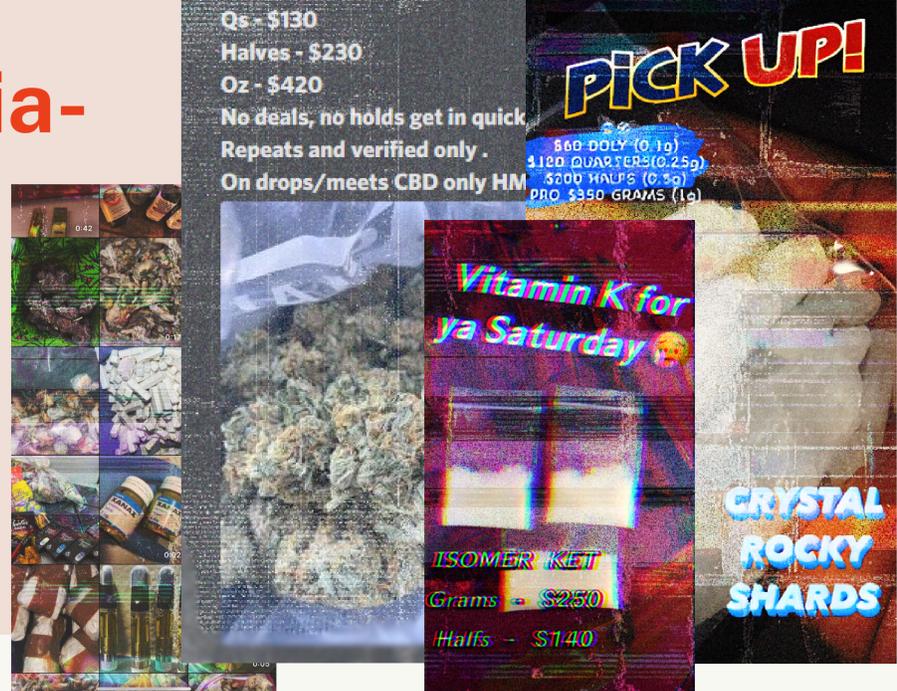
The evolution of social media-facilitated drug markets in Aotearoa New Zealand

AUTHORS

Robin van der Sanden, PhD
Chris Wilkins, PhD
Marta Rychert, PhD
Jose S. Romeo, PhD
Thomas Graydon-Guy, BA (Hons)

AFFILIATIONS

SHORE & Whāriki Research
Centre
Massey University
New Zealand



INTRODUCTION

Social media and messaging apps are increasingly used to buy and sell drugs, particularly among youth. Researchers suggest these drug markets may increase youth access to drugs and drug use harms. Little is known about how these markets have evolved in Aotearoa New Zealand's unique drug market landscape.

OBJECTIVE

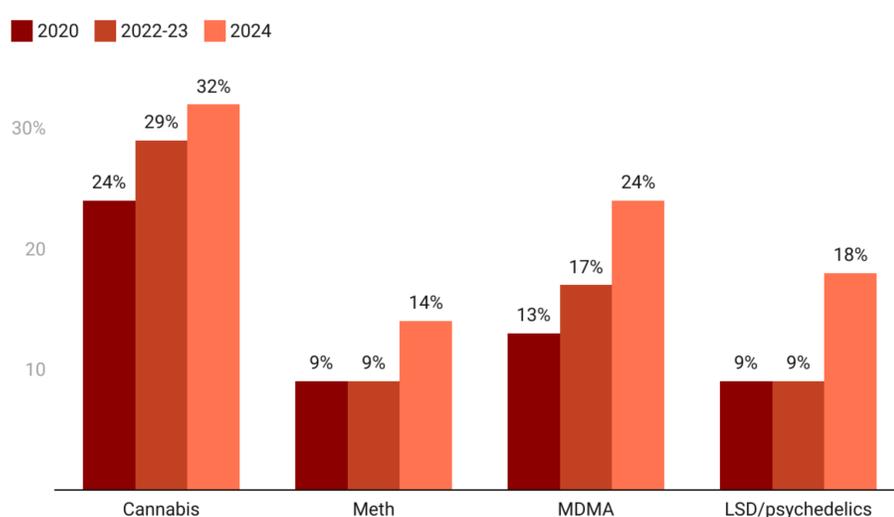
To explore the characteristics of social media-facilitated drug trading in NZ and their implications for youth-targeted harm reduction.

METHODOLOGY

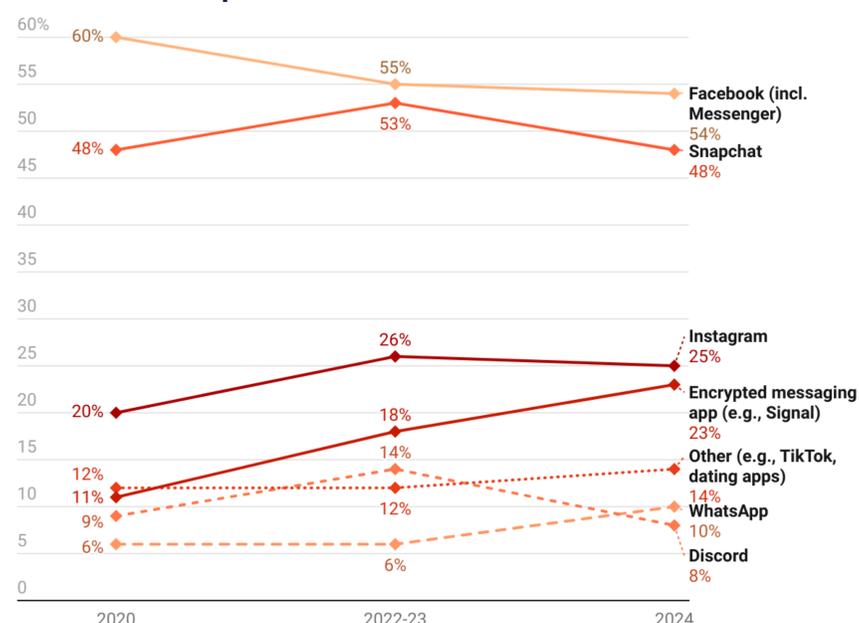
- Survey data from successive waves of the New Zealand Drug Trends Survey (NZDTS) from 2020-2024 (N=>10,000)
- Anonymous app-based interviews with people who buy and/or sell drugs via social media in NZ (N=33, median age: 24)

NZDTS RESULTS (2020-2024)

Reported drug purchasing from a social media "location" by drug type among NZDTS respondents from 2020-2024.



Most used apps for drug purchasing among NZDTS respondents from 2020-2024



INTERVIEW RESULTS

- Potential for social media-facilitated drug markets to both increase or decrease drug market harms contingent on the market type used.
- Trades between strangers (e.g., selling groups on Discord or Messenger) = elevated risks of drug market harms if not tightly managed.
- Markets extending social supply dynamics using social media networking features (e.g., visible profiles, mutual friends lists) = expanded, convenient drug access with less risk.

Discord is known for having people on it who are only on there to roll (rob) others but on Snapchat the dealers are pretty much 100 percent trustworthy since you always get them through other people. (P29, M19, buyer/seller)

You're really only able to judge a dealer's character through their messages/social media profile, could be far more dangerous than what you think. (P32, M19, buyer/seller)

I've also been added to group chats. It's a variety of friends and friends of friends... these are people I have met at least once either in a club, party, through work, etc who I trust very well. So I don't get attacked or get cut products. (P31, M24, buyer/seller)

CONCLUSION

- Social media and messaging apps have emerged as a stable feature of the New Zealand drug market landscape, particularly among younger age groups.
- Some market types pose more safety risks than others
- Importance of targeting harm reduction across platforms and apps to reach different audiences and drug market types
- More research needed to evaluate their impacts on drug use patterns and drug harms
- Drug regulation responses to harm increasingly intertwined with digital technology regulations

CONTACT

r.vandersanden@massey.ac.nz
<https://nzdrugtrends.co.nz>



REFERENCES

- van der Sanden, R., Wilkins, C., Romeo, J. S., Rychert, M., & Barratt, M. J. (2021). Predictors of using social media to purchase drugs in New Zealand: Findings from a large-scale online survey. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 98, 103430.
- van der Sanden, R., Wilkins, C., Rychert, M., & Barratt, M. J. (2022). 'Choice' of social media platform or encrypted messaging app to buy and sell illegal drugs. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 108, 103819.
- van der Sanden, R., Wilkins, C., Rychert, M., & Barratt, M. J. (2022). The Use of Discord Servers to Buy and Sell Drugs. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 49(4), 453-477.
- van der Sanden, R., Wilkins, C., Rychert, M., & Barratt, M. J. (2023). Social Supply and the Potential for Harm Reduction in Social Media Drug Markets. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 50(3), 381-401.