

COVID-19 AWARENESS, ONLINE DISCOURSE, AND VACCINE DISTRIBUTION IN MELANESIA

Evidence and Analysis from
Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and
Vanuatu



The Asia Foundation

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and Vanuatu

Project Director: John Karr

Editors: Benjamin Lokshin
Casey Morris
Katherine Loh

Consultant writers: Romitesh Kant
Leanne Jorari
Tess Newton Cain

Cover design and layout: Ananda K. Maharjan

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The Asia Foundation
465 California Street, 9th Floor
San Francisco, CA U.S.A. 94104
www.asiafoundation.org

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Delivering authentic and accurate information to citizens about the safety and efficacy of Covid-19 vaccines is central to the success of national vaccination initiatives. However, vaccine-related online mis- and disinformation in the Pacific is complicating this effort and contributing to confusion and uncertainty around vaccines, the nature of the pandemic, and the virus itself. Reducing “information disorder” in the region is a critical step in ensuring that governments can move beyond the social and economic disruption created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This report presents overall findings and analysis of perception survey data on Covid-19 awareness and information consumption in three countries within the subregion of Melanesia: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu. To contextualize these findings, the report also examines trends and patterns of discourse on Covid-19 within large social media communities in each country. This research project, which was led by The Asia Foundation in collaboration with researchers specializing in Melanesian media ecosystems and measurement of public perceptions, illustrates deepening relationships between online discourse in these countries’ growing digital ecosystems and the broader public’s perceptions of the pandemic. It also contains important implications for Covid-19 vaccine rollout and preparedness for future “infodemics.”

Pandemic-related information disorder challenges are highlighted in three Melanesian countries—Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu. The report also reflects Covid-19 information challenges common across the three countries.

Key findings include:

- Social media is playing an important role in transmitting information about Covid-19, but the quality and trustworthiness of this information is believed to be low. Government and health authorities will need to adapt their messaging frameworks to not only reach people online, but also counter growing mis- and disinformation. Online platform companies should commit to working with local

authorities and civil society stakeholders to improve the quality and effectiveness of safeguards against these threats.

- While basic facts about the virus are widely known, certain false and harmful narratives about the pandemic remain prominent both offline and online. Most citizens are aware of simple preventative measures, but rumors and conspiracy theories are still prevalent on social media, including anti-5G narratives that overlap with dangerous anti-vaccine theories. A significant proportion of survey respondents believe that disproven or alternative treatments can protect them from the virus.
- Information ecosystems, including modes of online messaging by public officials, shape the flow of misinformation. Papua New Guinea's information ecosystem is particularly affected by public distrust and confusion about Covid-19 messages, likely contributing to the finding that one in six respondents in the country believe Covid-19 is a "hoax" or not real.
- Community institutions and leaders, especially religious leaders and healthcare workers, have retained trust even among skeptical cohorts. These individuals can help disseminate vaccine acceptance messaging to many communities in the region.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted many ways social media and online platforms drive public discourse, risk perception, and trust in institutions. While Pacific island countries and territories have mostly avoided severe outbreaks of the virus, they remain vulnerable to the spread of false and harmful Covid-19 information on social media platforms. As the region's leaders prepare for vaccine distribution in 2021 and beyond, it is important to ask why and how Covid-19 misinformation spread on social media in the region and assess the degree to which this could impact vaccination efforts going forward.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding how information, and misinformation, is spread in Melanesia is critical to avoiding a surge of infections in places that have so far managed to remain largely safe from the virus. It is also vital to vaccine distribution efforts, as an effective vaccination effort is a critical step in the process of safely reopening the Pacific to tourism, a sector of the economy upon which so much of the region's income depends.

This report draws on original perception survey data collected in August and September 2020 in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu. In nationally representative phone surveys conducted by The Asia Foundation with Tebbutt Research, respondents in each country each were asked what they knew about Covid-19, where they found their information about the pandemic, and how they used social media. In addition, the Foundation worked with several Pacific researchers to analyze social media discourse in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu in order to identify key messages that were being shared, especially through the large and growing Facebook groups that have become hotbeds of social and political debate within the region. These findings are further contextualized by a [region-wide report](#) on trends and responses to COVID-19 misinformation that The Asia Foundation released in November 2020.

Despite belonging to a common regional grouping, the three countries examined for this project differ in many social, economic, and political aspects. The pandemic has also affected each country in different ways. Subsequent chapters describe more specific trends around Covid-19 awareness and online narratives in each country, including deeper analysis of survey results. On the aggregate, though, examining the common challenges faced by these countries as they grapple with Covid-19 provides useful findings that are relevant for each country and for the region as a whole.

Covid-19 Infections

The Covid-19 pandemic was confirmed to have reached Oceania on 25 January 2020 with the first confirmed case reported in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.¹ It has since spread elsewhere in the region, with cases reported in Australia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Northern Mariana Islands, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna. Still, outbreaks within the region have been mostly small and quickly contained, in large part due to the quick action by Pacific leaders to close their borders and impose strict quarantine measures before the virus reached their shores. As a result, many small Pacific island nations have never recorded a single case, and no Pacific country or territory excluding Australia, New Zealand, Guam, French Polynesia, and Papua New Guinea have recorded more than one thousand cases in total.

These proactive responses to the virus, including border closures, are driven by fears of the severe impacts an uncontained outbreak would have on the region due to a general lack of healthcare infrastructure. These concerns will not abate quickly, since the same factors that have hindered the delivery of health services (including difficult terrain, lack of transport connectivity, security challenges, and low number of physicians per capita) will also slow the rollout of vaccinations.

Establishing protocols for an efficient and effective vaccine rollout is essential to revitalizing the regional tourism industry. Hospitality sectors have ground to a halt in Pacific island nations and a comprehensive vaccine program is necessary to make travel to the region once again safe for locals and tourists, and to inspire confidence in global travelers.

Fiji

The Fijian government began preparing for Covid-19 in late January 2020, working closely with the World Health Organization, New Zealand, and Australia to build its domestic capacity to identify, trace, and contain potential cases and to procure additional ventilators, medical masks and other critical items. In early February, Fiji began implementing, and gradually tightening, restrictions on travellers who had spent time in existing hotspots.

Fiji confirmed its first case of the coronavirus on March 19. The Ministry of Health deployed contact tracing teams to track and monitor all possible cases. On March 25, Fiji grounded commercial international flights and sealed its borders. The Fijian government locked down Lautoka and Suva, where cases were confirmed. It also banned social gatherings and imposed a nationwide curfew. Between March 19 and April 20, Fiji confirmed six clusters and 18 cases of COVID-19, but the disease never reached community transmission level. A total of 63 cases have been recorded in Fiji as of March 2021. The last report of a case outside of border quarantine facilities was on April 18, 2020.²

Papua New Guinea

As of March 1, 2021, Papua New Guinea has had 1,365 Covid-19 cases reported around the country.³ Seventeen of its 22 provinces have seen cases, and there have been fourteen known deaths caused by the virus. After the National Capital District, which has had 505 confirmed cases, the largest number of cases have been in Western Province (323 cases), which sits on the land border with Indonesia, and West New Britain Province (196 cases). Reports from local media in Port Moresby and Western Province indicate a lack of capacity in hospitals to cope with a potential outbreak. Nurses went on strike in Port Moresby in late March 2020, citing the need for more personal protective equipment (PPE). Meanwhile in Western Province, doctors raised concerns about the risk of infection from bordering Indonesia and the lack of PPE as well.

Vanuatu

The health impacts of Covid-19 have been minimal in Vanuatu. Only one case had been reported as of March 1—a repatriated male citizen. The case was picked up as part of standard quarantine testing, and the patient was managed in an isolation unit at the Vila Central Hospital. He subsequently tested negative and has now completed quarantine and returned to his family. In the early stages of the pandemic, there was great concern about available capacity within the health system to deal with a significant outbreak, should one occur. Prior to 2020, Vanuatu only had two ventilators in the country. There are ongoing concerns about the availability of enough testing equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE). A number of donations of these have been facilitated by international development partners. While the overall demographic profile of Vanuatu is one of a relatively young country, there are additional risk factors present in the population. In particular, there are significant levels of both hypertension and diabetes.

Technology and Media Ecosystems

COUNTRY	POPULATION (2019) ⁴	INTERNET USERS (% OF TOTAL POP.) ⁵	ACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS (2021 EST.) ⁶
Fiji	899,953	70.5%	610,000
Papua New Guinea	8,776,109	15.2%	930,000
Vanuatu	299,882	33.5%	110,000

Fiji

The use of mobile phone technology has become pervasive in Fiji, especially in urban areas. However, the growth in mobile penetration in the country has driven an exponential increase of mobile phone use in rural areas as well. Because of this, social media will likely play a significant role in shaping political discourse and activism. Many Fijian critics established digital presences through online blogs and social media platforms in response to the government curtailing media freedom in Fiji after the 2006 coup. Estimates from market research firms Hootsuite and We Are Social place the number of internet users in Fiji at approximately 634,000, equal to 70% of the national population. The total potential reach of Facebook in Fiji was estimated to be 570,000, or approximately 85% of the total population aged 13 or more.⁷

Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea is the Pacific region's largest but least developed telecommunications market. Estimates from Hootsuite and We Are Social place internet penetration at only 15% of the population.⁸ However, among those with access, social media use is high. Out of a population of almost 9 million, there are more than 900,000 active Facebook. Twitter and TikTok are also used by a minority of internet users in Papua New Guinea—likely less than 1% of the population. Meanwhile, recent developments are expanding access to the internet in the country. The Asian Development Bank is providing \$25 million dollars to finance a greenfield 4G mobile telecommunications network that will enhance mobile, broadband, and internet services in Papua New Guinea. The Australian government has deployed the Coral Sea Cable system at a cost of AUD\$136.6 million, which will broaden digital access to vital information.

Vanuatu

Vanuatu is generally well served by internet and mobile phone coverage. Since the mobile phone market was liberalized and Digicel entered the market, the use of mobile phones has increased significantly. Coverage is extensive, although not universal. The availability of high-speed internet has increased since the arrival of undersea cable connections. This makes for increased reliability of service. However, costs are still high. According to Hootsuite and We Are Social estimates from 2021, Vanuatu's internet penetration stands at approximately 34% and out of a population of 300,000, there are roughly 110,000 active social media accounts.⁹ Literacy is relatively high, surpassing 87% among ni-Vanuatu over 15 and with very little difference between men and women.¹⁰

COVID-19 NARRATIVES IN FIJI

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Misinformation about Covid-19 is present in Fiji, but among the general public, belief that the pandemic is a “hoax” is very low. Only 6% of respondents in this nationally representative survey believed that the virus was “not real or a hoax.” Awareness of key protective measures is also high, and Fijians are generally concerned about the threat Covid-19 poses to their community. Respondents who believed that the virus was a hoax were also much less trustful of official government information sources.

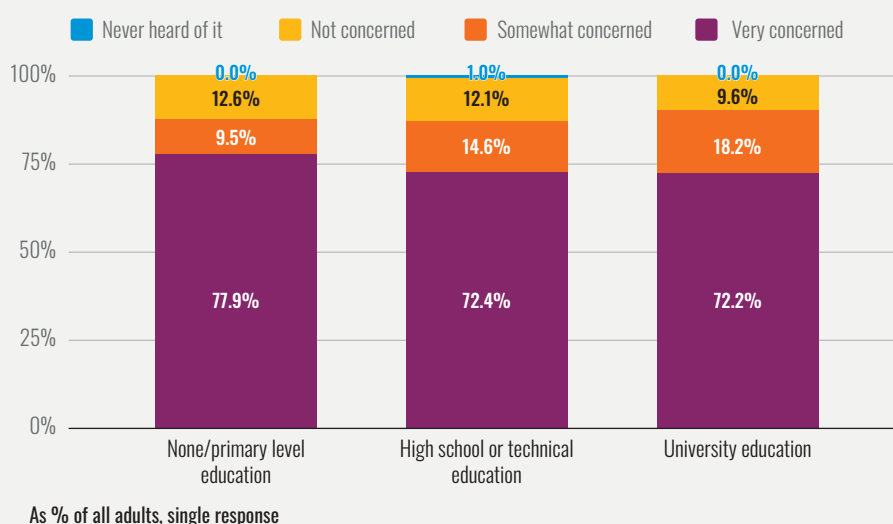
Facebook serves as a conduit of information about the pandemic, particularly among younger Fijians. But the quality and trustworthiness of social media is believed to be low. For young Fijians (18-29 years old), Facebook was the second most commonly accessed information source on Covid-19, after television and roughly on par with radio. But despite the high usage, trust and satisfaction in social media as an information source about Covid-19 is lower than that of official and conventional sources. The vast majority of Facebook users say they see false information about Covid-19 on the platform either “frequently” or “occasionally,” and the small minority who believe Covid-19 is a “hoax” were actually less likely to have found information from social media than the mainstream population. In addition, while Fiji is more connected than Papua New Guinea, and sees higher social media use, Fijians were much less likely to believe Covid-19 was a hoax than Papua New Guineans.

Large Facebook groups in Fiji are promoting false narratives relating to Covid-19 that reconfigure foreign disinformation to explain local events and confirm locally-held beliefs. Despite the fact that the technology does not exist in Fiji, local Facebook communities seized upon anti-5G misinformation originating in U.S. and European media ecosystems and drew a connection between 5G networks and local Covid-19 infections, lockdowns, and unrelated natural phenomena. In addition, while awareness of the importance of handwashing and quarantining is nearly universal, a lower but still substantial number of respondents appeared to believe in false or pseudoscientific “protective measures” that have spread widely on social media, such as avoiding mobile phone towers or avoiding cold foods and cold temperatures. One challenge in combating misinformation spread in Facebook groups is that they may have high membership numbers, but they can be set to “private.” The content posted and shared there may not be as easily accessible to non-group members, allowing false narratives to spread. Additionally, Facebook may not be able to be as aggressive in pursuing false information in private groups as it would with individual posts or public posts and comments.

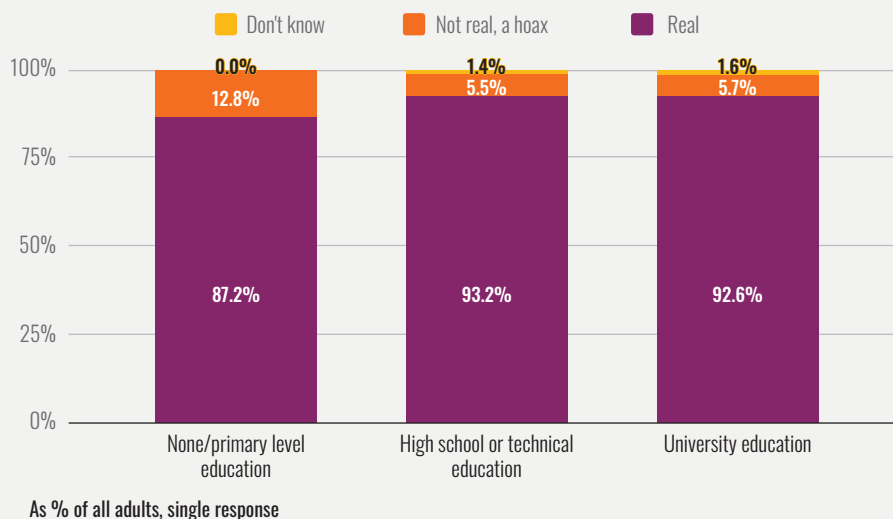
Covid-19 Awareness & Public Perceptions in Fiji

The survey results indicate that Fijians are generally aware of Covid-19 and concerned about the threat it may pose to their community. Nearly nine in ten Fijians are either “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” about Covid-19, which is a similar level to Vanuatu and a bit higher than Papua New Guinea. Extremely few respondents claimed to have never heard of Covid-19. This suggests that the government and media have largely succeeded in making Fijians aware of the threat of Covid-19, at least at a general level.

LEVEL OF CONCERN ABOUT COVID-19 IN FIJI (BY RESPONDENT'S EDUCATION LEVEL)



BELIEF IN REALITY OF COVID-19 IN FIJI (BY RESPONDENT'S EDUCATION LEVEL)

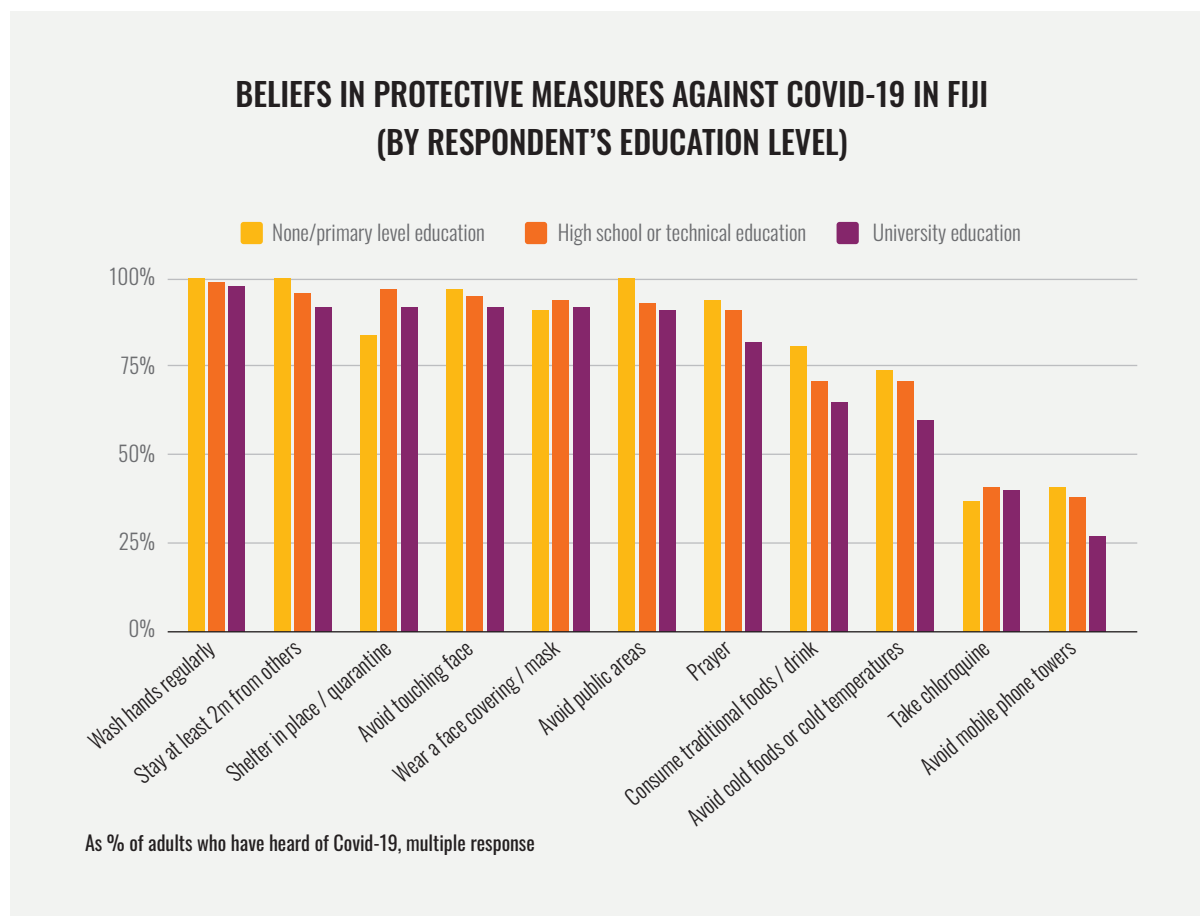


Respondents were also asked whether they believed Covid-19 was “real” or “not real, like a hoax.” This question was intended to gauge some potential effects of harmful misinformation and attempts to discredit information from official sources. Only about 6% claimed to believe that Covid-19 is a hoax—a much lower figure than in Papua New Guinea, where 16% did not believe the virus was real. Though this finding suggests that the absolute number of “Covid-19 deniers” is low, a small and vocal minority can still generate problems for public communication.

In terms of awareness of protective measures against Covid-19, such as wearing masks, quarantining, and hand-washing, the survey results again indicate that knowledge of protective behavior is widespread. Nearly all respondents agreed that hand-washing, sheltering in place (or quarantining), and wearing a face covering could protect them from Covid-19. In addition, one clear result is that a majority of people believe in prayer as a protective measure against the virus; this is perhaps unsurprising given that most Fijians are religious. Respondents were able to select multiple responses to this question.

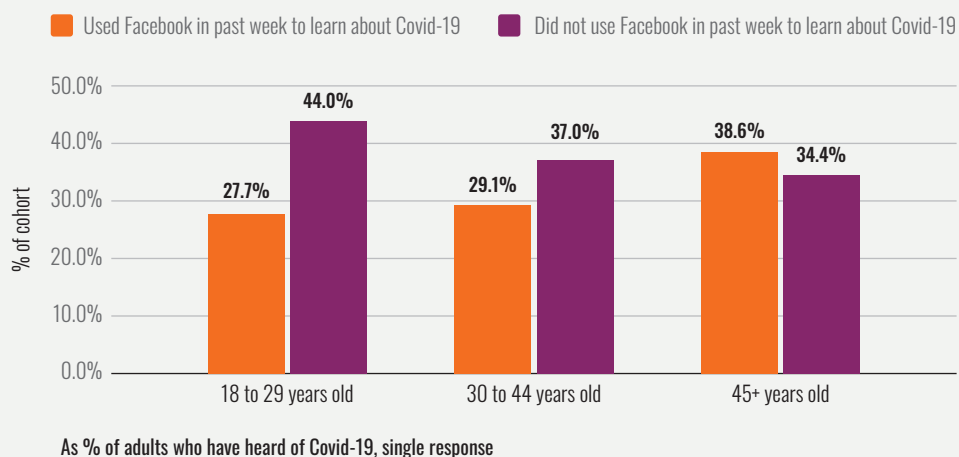
When asked about unproven, or non-scientific treatments, a fair number of respondents still claimed that they would be effective. About two-thirds agreed that avoiding cold foods or cold temperatures and consuming traditional foods and drinks would protect them. These beliefs are widespread around the world and on social media, but are generally not supported by science.¹¹ About 40% believed that taking chloroquine, widely known in the Pacific as an anti-malaria drug, would help. Claims around the efficacy of chloroquine or hydroxychloroquine for treating Covid-19 have been put forward by a number of individuals, but it does not have support from the mainstream medical community. Finally, about one-third believed that avoiding mobile phone towers would help them stay safe from Covid-19. This question was included so as to probe the effects of common conspiracy theories around 5G mobile networks.

Examining the effects of social media usage on these beliefs is difficult due to the number of confounding factors that affect how an individual gathers information and forms views. But the data does show some patterns when looking at the beliefs of people who received information about Covid-19 from Facebook versus those who did not.

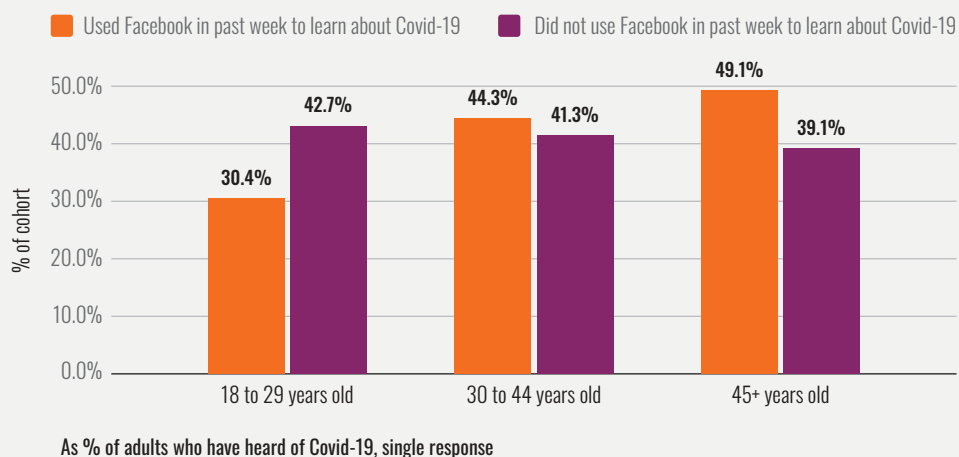


For instance, most people in Fiji did not believe that avoiding phone towers would be an effective way of avoiding Covid-19 infection. But young people who said they had obtained information about Covid-19 from Facebook within the last week were even less likely to believe this, whereas for older people (over 45), use of Facebook did not correlate with any decrease in that belief. This would suggest that young Fijians may be using Facebook in a way that makes them more informed about this issue, or at least less likely to believe false theories connecting mobile phone towers and Covid-19 risk, whereas older people may not be. In a similar vein, about one quarter of young people (18-29 years old) who found Covid-19 information on Facebook believed that chloroquine could protect them from the virus, compared to one half of their older (45+ years old) counterparts who found information on Facebook.

BELIEF THAT AVOIDING MOBILE PHONE TOWERS CAN PROTECT FROM COVID-19 IN FIJI (BY RESPONDENT'S USE OF FACEBOOK)

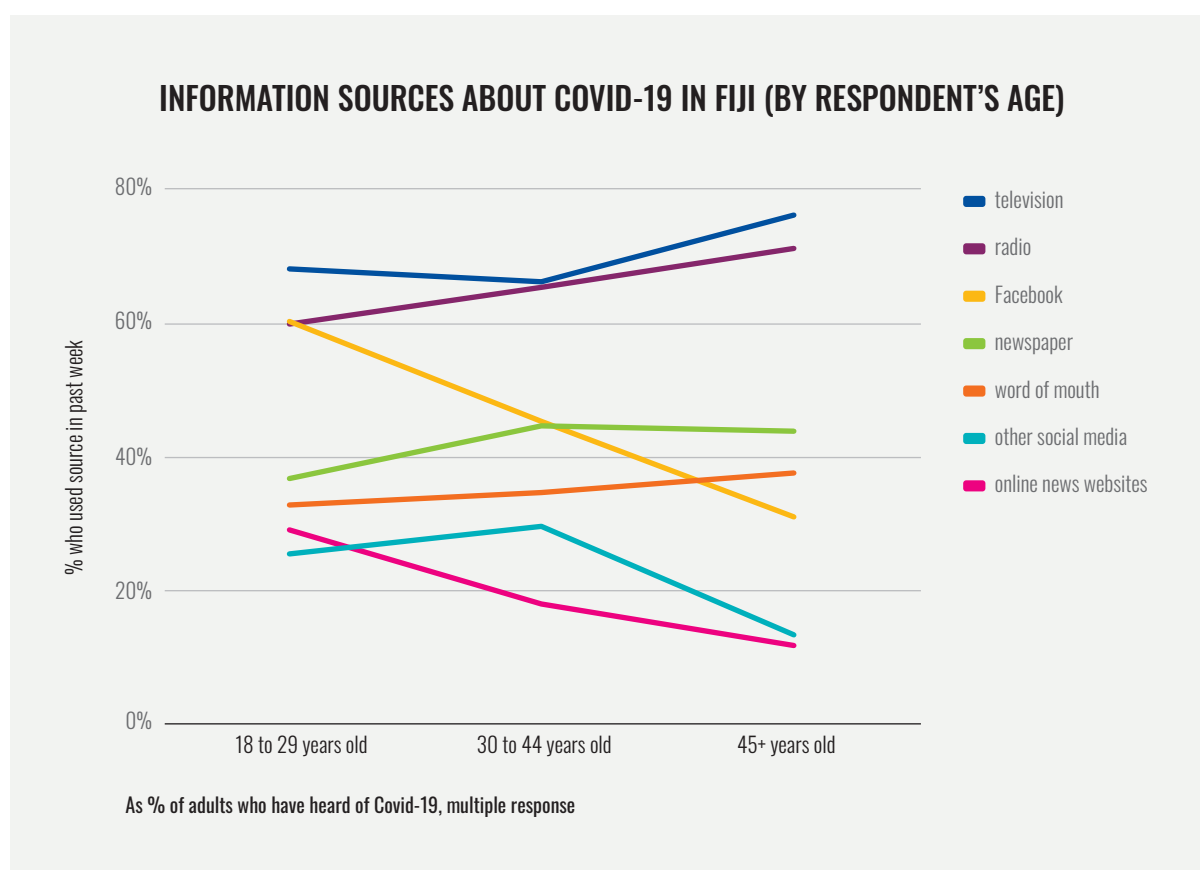


BELIEF THAT TAKING CHLOROQUINE CAN PROTECT FROM COVID-19 IN FIJI (BY RESPONDENT'S USE OF FACEBOOK)



Information ecosystems

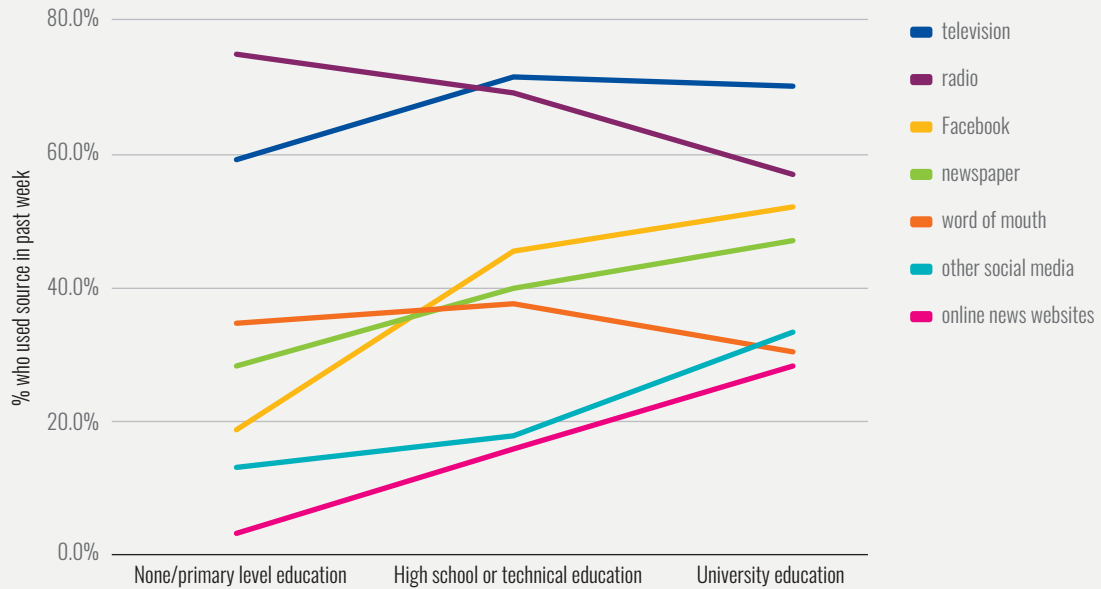
To better understand information consumption in the region, survey respondents in Fiji were asked where they had received information about Covid-19 in the past week. The responses suggest that traditional media—especially radio and television—are still the primary information sources for most Fijians. However, unlike in Vanuatu or Papua New Guinea, Facebook has actually reached the third-place position in Fiji, surpassing newspapers and even “word of mouth.” Other social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok, as well as online news websites, are also widely used.



Age and education level are both important factors in how Fijians consume media. Younger and more educated people are more likely to use Facebook and other digital media; older people and less educated people are more likely to use radio.

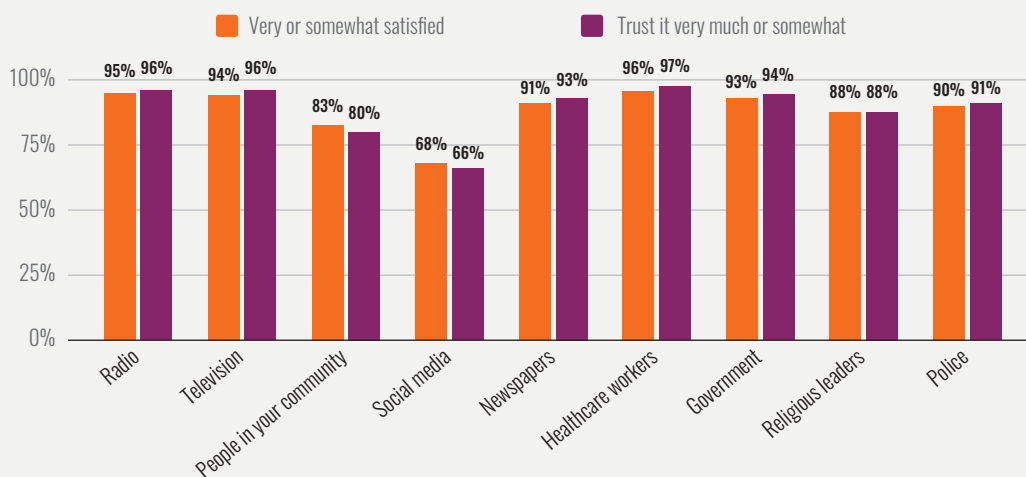
Satisfaction with these information sources also varies according to age and education, but social media is the least trusted source.

INFORMATION SOURCES ABOUT COVID-19 IN FIJI (BY RESPONDENT'S EDUCATION LEVEL)

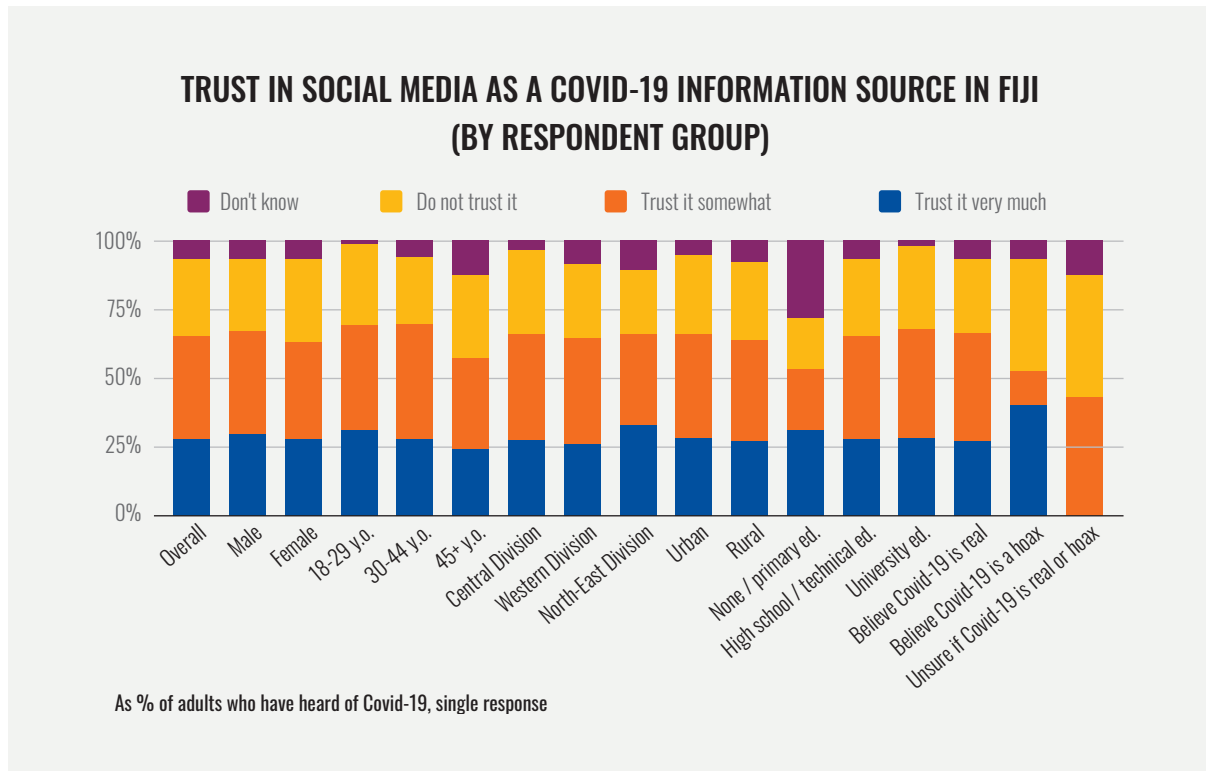


As % of adults who have heard of Covid-19, multiple response

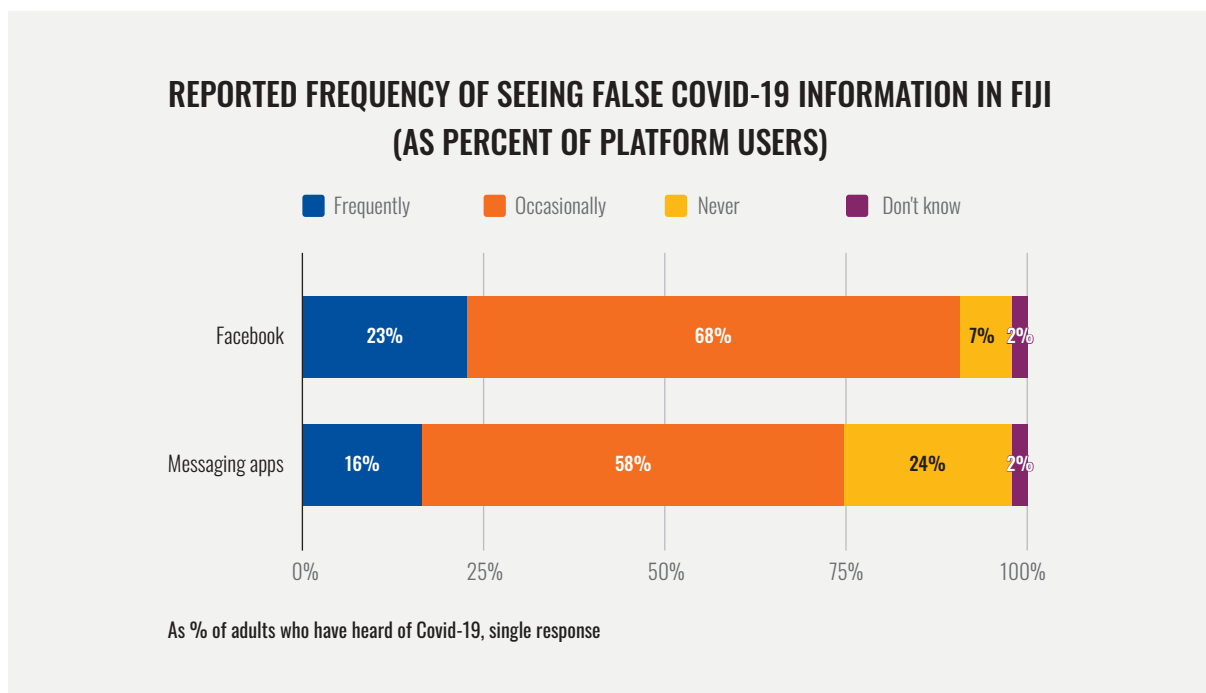
TRUST AND SATISFACTION WITH COVID-19 INFORMATION SOURCES IN FIJI



As % of adults who have heard of Covid-19, single response

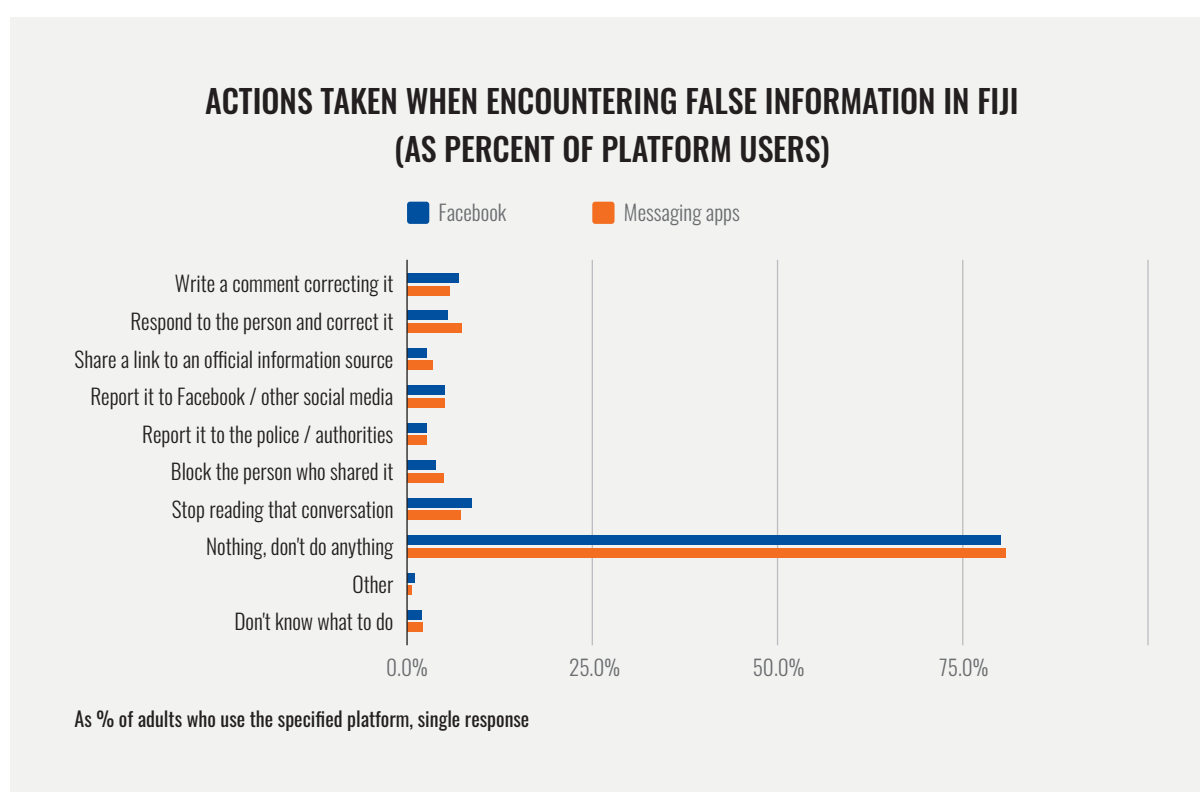


To understand social media users’ general perceptions of and reactions to truth and falsehood online, the survey also asked Facebook and messaging app users in Fiji how often they saw misinformation about Covid-19 on these platforms and what actions they generally take in response.



The frequency with which people claimed to see false information was fairly similar across the populations surveyed, without noticeable differences along demographic lines. Overall, the vast majority of people claim that they see false information about Covid-19 at least occasionally, and one in five Facebook users claim to see falsehoods about Covid-19 on the platform “frequently.” The information that people receive via messaging apps is either more reliable or more trusted than what people see on Facebook, since almost one quarter claimed to “never” see false information on messaging apps, compared with 7% on Facebook. Although the survey did not probe why social media users believe they see more false information on Facebook than on messaging apps, this perception may have to do with whether they trust the person sharing the information with them. A direct message via a trusted friend, family member or acquaintance may inspire more trust and less skepticism than a post that appears in a social feed from someone they don’t know well or at all.

When people see a false post, they are much more likely to do nothing than to take action that would either correct the misconception for other users or lead to the removal of the post. This is an important consideration for product designers building software for use in Fiji, since it suggests that relying on Fijian users to proactively correct misinformation online is unlikely to succeed.



Trends in Online Covid-19 Narratives in Fiji

People in Fiji use a range of different social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube, as well as messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram. The country has several particularly large and active Facebook groups, two of which were examined for this project. Conversations in these groups—and across Fijian social media more generally—most often take place in English, Fijian, or Fijian Hindi, often in its romanized form.

False and harmful information took a variety of forms across Fijian social media, especially toward the beginning of the pandemic. The pandemic became politicized as early as February 2020, when an opposition MP used her personal Facebook page to amplify claims that the virus could be carried to Fiji by the trade winds and that the government's plan to treat Covid-19 patients at Navua Hospital would place citizens at risk.¹² After the country's first case was identified in March 2020 and lockdowns were imposed in Lautoka, fear and confusion spread quickly on social media and messaging apps and instigated a wave of panic buying before the authorities were able to respond.¹³ The same MP was charged—and ultimately acquitted—under the Public Order Act for statements she made on Facebook on March 19 that encouraged citizens to stock up on food.¹⁴ Fear and online misinformation also led to harassment and vilification of several Covid-19 patients in Fiji.¹⁵ Personal information and misinformation about these patients spread quickly on Facebook and messaging applications, including speculation about their religious practices, sexual orientation, and social circles.

Social media also enabled international conspiracy theories about Covid-19 to be imported, adapted, and reconfigured to fit local events in Fiji. Perhaps most notable among these conspiracy theories is the belief that 5G mobile broadband technology and the Covid-19 virus are somehow connected. These false theories generally take two forms: 1) assertions that radiation from 5G lowers one's immune system, which makes one more vulnerable to the virus, and 2) claims that exposure to 5G signals directly causes Covid-19.¹⁶ There are also a number of variations around this conspiracy theory that allege elaborate cover-ups by China, Bill Gates, or other prominent individuals.¹⁷

These 5G narratives, though by no means mainstream beliefs, are important to study because they often inspire or support anti-vaccine misinformation. On Fijian Facebook groups that were examined for this report, both forms of the 5G

conspiracies identified above were noticeable. The research team logged dozens of such posts from the first half of 2020 that garnered significant engagement in large Fiji-specific Facebook groups. The following sections provide a brief overview of how these beliefs arrived and spread.

False 5G narratives are imported to Fiji

Understanding the origins and prevalence of false 5G narratives in Fiji is essential to laying the foundation for a successful vaccine rollout. Much of the false information being spread about 5G not only links it to the global Covid-19 outbreak, but also to the vaccines. Conspiracy theorists and their supporters suggest that the vaccine is a mechanism to insert a microchip in recipients, which will then be activated by 5G technology. The spread of such beliefs could hinder attempts to vaccinate the Fijian population, to prevent future outbreaks, and to reopen the economy.

One of the first Covid-related posts to be shared in the Chat(Fiji) group was an article in early February 2020 claiming that Wuhan is located in the Chinese province that first rolled out 5G networks and links to an open letter from “180 scientists and physicians” that warns of the dangers of 5G technology (including “flu-like symptoms”). Following this, two other links were shared that claimed that “Wuhan was the province where 5G was rolled out, now the center of deadly virus” provides a clear indication of its overall theme. According to other researchers, this was actually the first English-language post outlining the 5G-Covid links that circulated widely via Facebook.¹⁸

China launched its 5G national network. World largest 5G network, around November 2019. One of the main 5G wireless connections was installed in Wuhan hospital where all equipments are connected wirelessly. The same city where the outbreak of covid19 started. Some big countries like Italy, Spain, USA, UK etc just recently rolled out 5G mostly on public places like Airports, Hospitals, Cities, Stadiums now have most numbers of covid19 cases.

In late February and early March, more posts appeared on Fijian Facebook groups claiming that Covid-19 is only the pretext for distributing a deadly vaccine which will be activated by 5G radiation and will lead to a mass depopulation of Earth at the behest of a obscure group that included Bill Gates and the Gates Foundation. These posts were accompanied by two YouTube videos, “Bill Gates calls for Global

Depopulation” and “Bill Gates – Microchip vaccine implants to fight coronavirus.” These two videos have subsequently been removed from YouTube for violating community standards and spreading misinformation. Further links were alleged between international organisations including the WHO and the UN, multinational technology firms like Huawei, prominent wealthy individuals such as Gates and George Soros, and others.

I have been following scientist and a group of people around the world for more than 5 years now and there have been many issues that we had been debating on like geo-engineering, chemtrails, vaccination, the fact that people think that some actrocities are more news worthy than others like palestine from west papua and 5G is one of them. This issue goes deeper than you think. Call them conspiracy theories whatever but they did warn me about Cyclone Winstons. I warned my family, but they didnt believe me until it hit. Many of us Christians are familiar with whats written in books of revelation. Most of these conspiracy theorist are not Christians, they dont know about revelation but they know about the one world order, one government, one system which many of us probably have heard it somewhere during childhood or have read about it growing up. All I’m saying why are they enforcing 5G technology all over the world during this crisis, why didnt they do it earlier or wait for the virus to eventually die down. Why at this moment??

Local Facebook groups form to amplify 5G-related misinformation

Following global trends, a new Facebook group was created in April called “Stop 5G in Fiji,” with the apparent intention of mobilising popular support to convince the Fijian government to stop the 5G network from being rolled out in the country. The group changed its name several times over the course of the year, likely in order to capitalize on current issues and grow its membership, which reached more than 14,000 by the end of 2020. Particularly in the first half of 2020, discussions in the group frequently contained misinformation about 5G networks, including speculation that 5G towers were already appearing in Fiji, that radiation from 5G towers caused or exacerbated health issues, and that the lockdown measures imposed around that time were linked to a vast global conspiracy that also involved 5G rollout. Posts in the group are mostly in English and are frequently copy-and-pasted from other groups or articles around the web, while comments and replies are in both English and Fijian.

People say no to 5G otherwise will get brain tumor or cancer down the line say few years from now. This high frequency of 5G once up it will be up 24/7 a week, all day/night and they have to place closer or shorter height like roof tops since its wave frequency abilities is shorter wave compare to 4G or 3G which can operate from a tower with a longer distance wave 5G operates better closer to the ground, meaning more closer to humans. Meaning humans will be exposed to radiation 27/4 which can cause cancer.

An analysis of some of the most popular and prominent posts from the group reveal further exaggeration of the Covid-19 and 5G rumours, repeatedly pushed by the pre-existing fixations of the various international conspiracy groups. While some continue to focus centrally on the supposed ill health effects of 5G radiation, others allege that Covid-19 is only a cover story to explain the effects of the 5G tests in Wuhan. Three posts (with links from obscure U.S. sites) draw a connection between 5G to a much more complicated theory involving bioengineering of Covid-19 with 5G-activated vaccines.

The vaccine to cure its devastating impact is the chip they'll implant in your right hand or head- Satan. There is a better Cure-Jesus. Implant Him in your heart and He will surely get you through

Another popular post on the Stop 5G in Fiji group was a video by the notorious English conspiracy theorist David Icke, who claimed that Covid-19 itself is a scam and is instead caused by 5G technology. While it was eventually taken down by YouTube, the post was shared more than 103 times garnering some very intense discussions in the group with some apocalyptic Christian themes and claims that Covid-19 and 5G are being used to bring about a mass vaccination event that aims to control the population by the Illuminati and the Freemasons. Other videos by and featuring David Icke were shared both on Chat(Fiji) and Stop 5G in Fiji Facebook groups, including those with titles such as “How People Are Controlled With This Pandemic Crisis - David Icke Predicted The Future” and “All Humans Will be microchipped by the year 2030.”

Local events reframed through the lens of viral misinformation

Although Fiji has been spared more organised offline anti-5G protests, one case highlights the localization of 5G conspiracy theories in a way that garnered the attention of the Fijian Government. On 6 April 2020, photos and videos of dead mynah birds in Savusavu, a town on the second largest island of Vanua Levu, appeared on both Chat(Fiji) and Stop 5G in Fiji Facebook groups. By Fijian standards, these posts went viral, with hundreds of shares, likes, and comments. These posts suggested, implicitly or explicitly, that the birds had died due to 5G, a technology that has yet to be introduced to Fiji. As a result of local pictures of these dead birds, more posts started appearing in anti-5G groups showing similar stories of dead birds in the Netherlands, UK, Germany, and Italy.

Following this, officials from the Department of Environment and Biosecurity Authority of Fiji were sent to Savusavu to investigate. In a statement, the Agriculture Minister stated that a post-mortem examination concluded that the deaths of the mynah birds were due to blunt trauma, denying that the death of the birds stemmed from Covid-19 and the 5G Network as speculated on Facebook. Reuters also fact-checked multiple posts of dead birds in Europe that were circulated via social media, clarifying that the pictures were from 2018 and that there were no links between the death of the birds and 5G or Covid-19.¹⁹ The “Stop 5G” group did not seem convinced by these fact-checks or statements—comments on a post that shared the article within the group openly mocked the findings—but the conversation within this particular group eventually moved on to other topics.

Imagine, all 6 cars dodging a huge pothole that wasn't there before, and hitting a power pole at the same time. Blame the pole? 😂😂😂

People are no longer fooled. Gone are those times, Mr Minister

Just check with the signal wave emitters any major works of test done around same time in Savu2??? Sa vaka tale na CSI murder case qo maaaaan!!
[It's like a CSI murder case!]

Implications for Vaccine Acceptance and Covid-19 Recovery

On the whole, the public in Fiji benefits from access to a range of authoritative information sources, including official reporting that is transmitted through traditional media and social media platforms. Overt denial of Covid-19 is quite low (about 6% say the virus is a “hoax”) and awareness of recommended protective measures is high. Trust and satisfaction in coverage of Covid-19 by the mainstream media and by the government and police are also high. All of these factors will support efforts toward a successful rollout of the Covid-19 vaccine.

At the same time, it is clear that public confidence in Fiji has been tested by the proliferation of false and harmful online narratives. About 68% of Fijian Facebook users and about 58% of messaging application users say they “frequently” see Covid-19 misinformation on these platforms. As in other countries, speculation and panic increased when demand for validated information outpaced supply, such as when the first few domestic cases were identified. But special-interest online communities dedicated to conspiracy theories pose a more subtle and insidious risk. Anti-5G groups are a noteworthy example here, since even where 5G technology itself is not a meaningful factor, the beliefs espoused by these communities often conflate Covid-19 vaccine rollouts with various alleged plots. The Fijian authorities sought to counter these theories through official messaging and denials, with mixed effect. Within the anti-5G groups themselves, official sources denying their theories are often dismissed as just another part of the vast conspiracy or as validation of their beliefs in the government’s incompetence. Among the general population, the survey results show that the belief that “avoiding mobile phone towers can keep one safe from Covid-19” is a view supported by about 35% of the population, though it is less prevalent among people with more education. But that figure still represents more than 300,000 people in the country.

Encouraging vaccine acceptance in Fiji will require local and international stakeholders to prepare to refute false narratives. A misinformed statement by a prominent official or online personality, a patient who complains about vaccine side effects, or even a new conspiracy theory that takes off overseas could quickly spin out of control. While Fiji’s present information ecosystem appears fairly resilient to these narratives, the threat of misinformation remains formidable.

COVID-19 NARRATIVES IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Papua New Guineans were less likely to be concerned about the pandemic or to believe in its validity. While almost all respondents (98%) had heard of the virus, approximately one in six Papua New Guinean adults—and one in five adults with primary level education or less—believed Covid-19 to be a “hoax” or not real, and one in ten said they don’t know what they believe. Despite the fact that the survey was undertaken just as a serious outbreak of the virus was hitting Port Moresby, only 63% of respondents in Papua New Guinea said they were “very concerned” about the virus, compared to 71% in Vanuatu and 73% in Fiji.

Usage of and trust in online information sources in Papua New Guinea, including social media, is strongly correlated with education and age. For the most digitally “connected” cohorts, i.e. university graduates and 18 to 29 year olds, Facebook is roughly equivalent to word of mouth and television as a source of Covid-19 information. Meanwhile, only about 9.5% of people with a primary-level education or less and 10.1% of people over 45 years old had used Facebook as a source of Covid-19 information in the week preceding the survey date. The overall Papua New Guinean public expressed relatively low satisfaction with and trust in the Covid-19 information they found on social media, but this was also correlated with age and education. For young people and university-educated people, trust and satisfaction in social media was roughly the same as the trust and satisfaction they feel within their local communities. This is significant, because Papua New Guinea’s population is made up of thousands of villages, clans and kinship groups that have traditionally provided the basis for interpersonal trust. For a young person to put as much trust in social media platforms as they do their local community connections—even if only for Covid-19 information—says a great deal about the influence these platforms have among younger members of Papua New Guinea’s society.

Papua New Guineans’ satisfaction with Covid-19 information sources is generally lower than in Fiji or Vanuatu, and the proportion who distrust mainstream media and government information is higher. While a majority of Papua New Guineans say that they trust and are satisfied

with the information they receive from traditional media, the government, the police, healthcare workers, religious leaders, and members of their community, it is not quite as large a majority as in Fiji or Vanuatu. In addition, the portion of the public that actively distrusts these sources is much larger in Papua New Guinea than in Fiji or Vanuatu. The individuals who believed Covid-19 to be a “hoax” were even more distrustful of every information source, except for religious leaders and members of their own community.

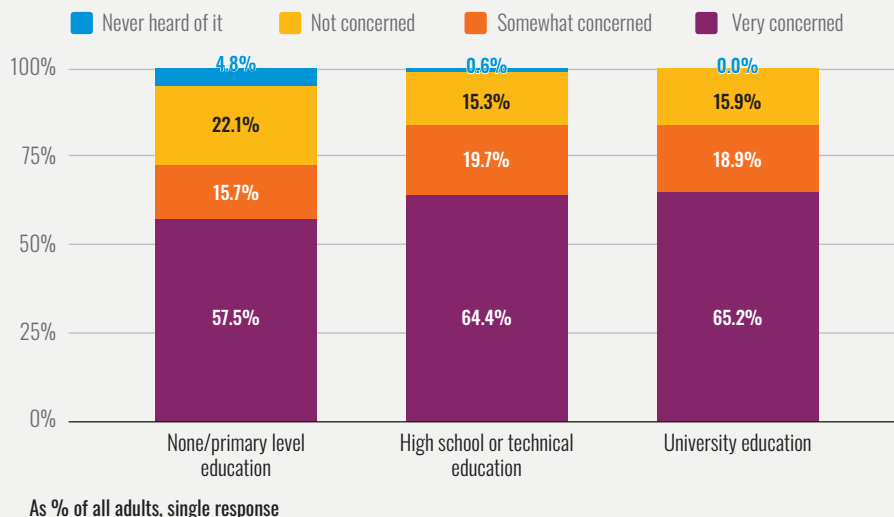
Online Covid-19 discourse in Papua New Guinea has been affected by inconsistent and competing information and the politicization of Covid-19 prevention and mitigation measures. An examination of Papua New Guinean Facebook groups finds that the pandemic did lead to an increase in posts related to health and Covid-19, but also significant sharing of unsubstantiated information, religious posts, and posts that stigmatized Covid-19 patients. National-level politicians dominate online discourse by engaging with the public through their personal Facebook accounts and pages, but not always in a coordinated or informative way.

Covid-19 Awareness & Public Perceptions in Papua New Guinea

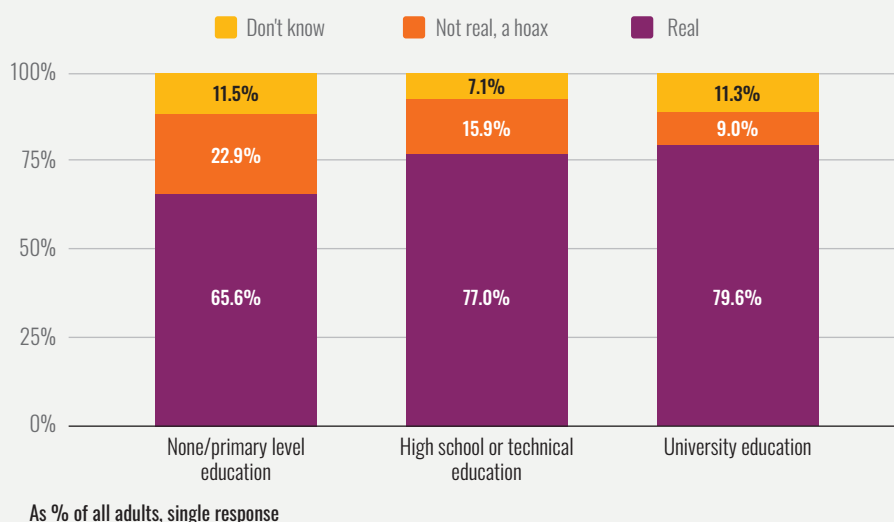
The perception survey carried out by the Asia Foundation and Tebutt Research indicates that there was some level of awareness of Covid-19 in all regions of Papua New Guinea, but that demographic factors affected both the degree to which they understood the threat of the virus and the ways in which they accessed information.

People in Papua New Guinea were generally aware of the coronavirus—only 2.1% of respondents said they had never heard of it—but among the three countries surveyed, people in Papua New Guinea were the least concerned with the threat of the virus. Just under 63% of respondents in Papua New Guinea said they were “very concerned,” a lower percentage compared to neighboring Vanuatu (71.0%) and Fiji (72.9%).

LEVEL OF CONCERN ABOUT COVID-19 IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA (BY RESPONDENT'S EDUCATION LEVEL)



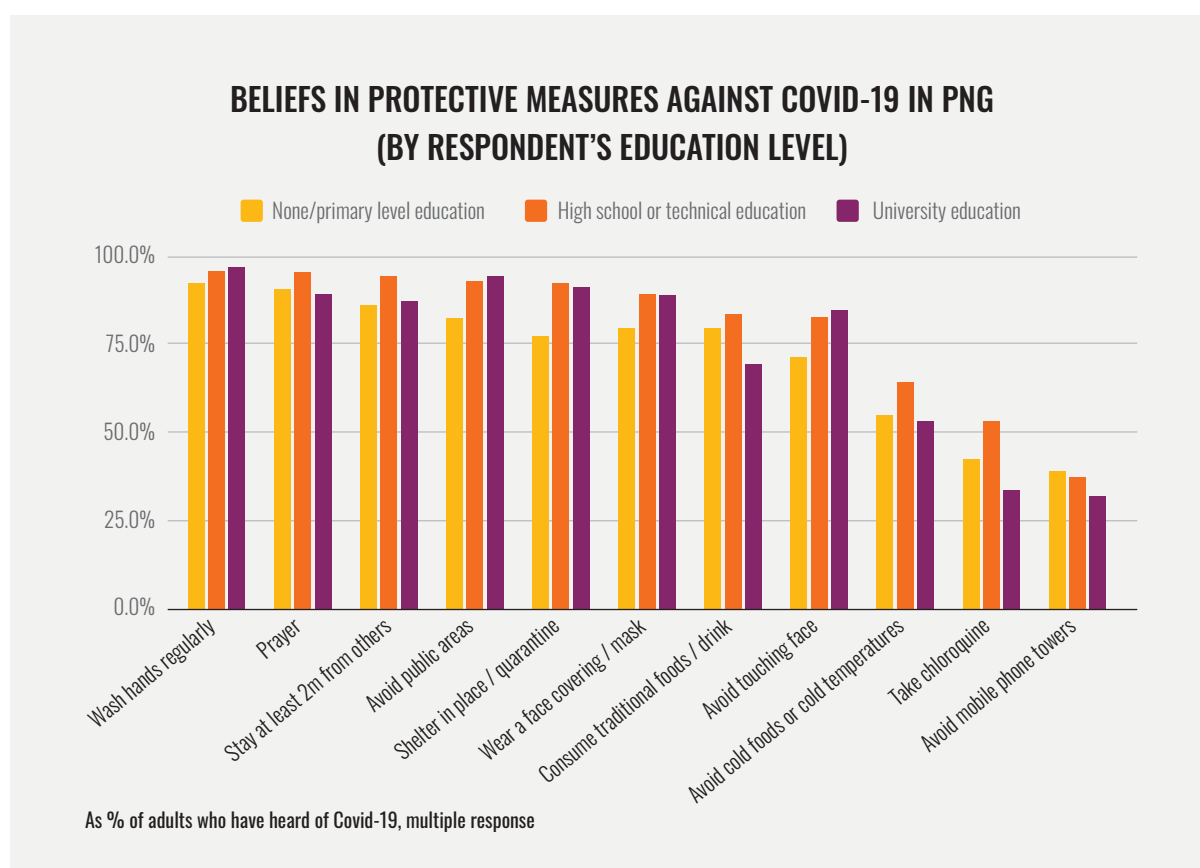
BELIEF IN REALITY OF COVID-19 IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA (BY RESPONDENT'S EDUCATION LEVEL)



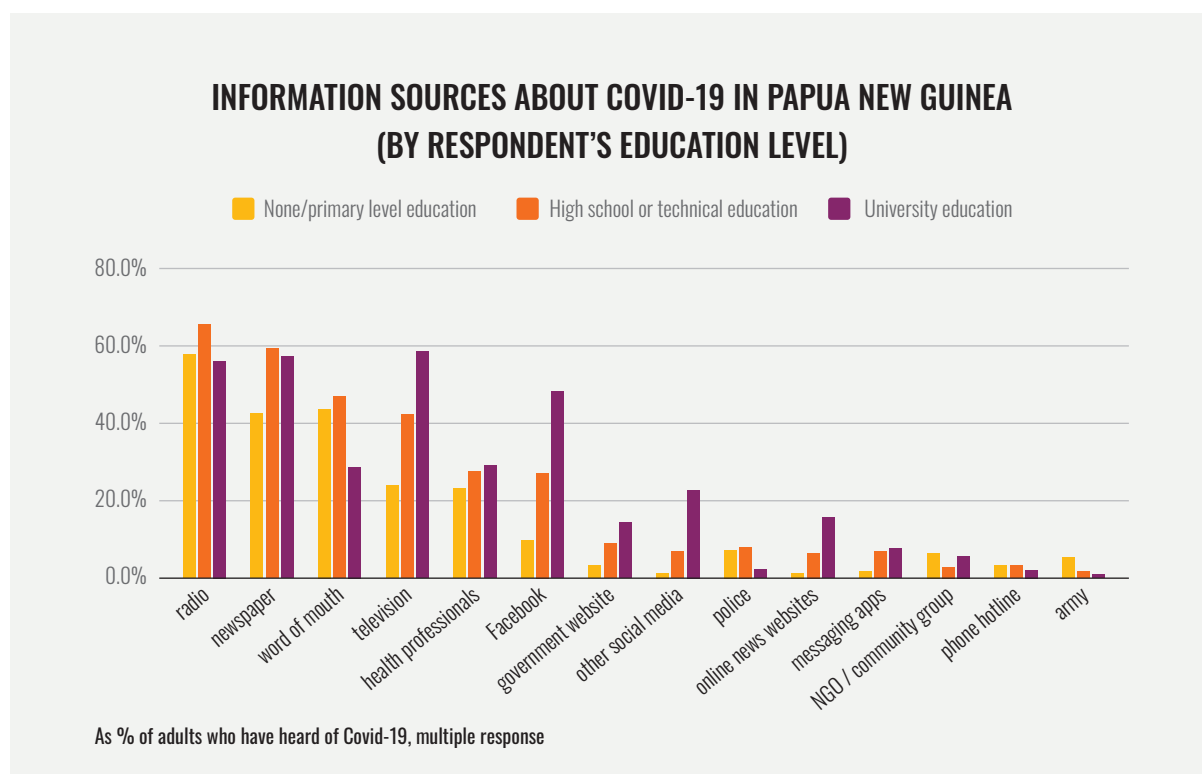
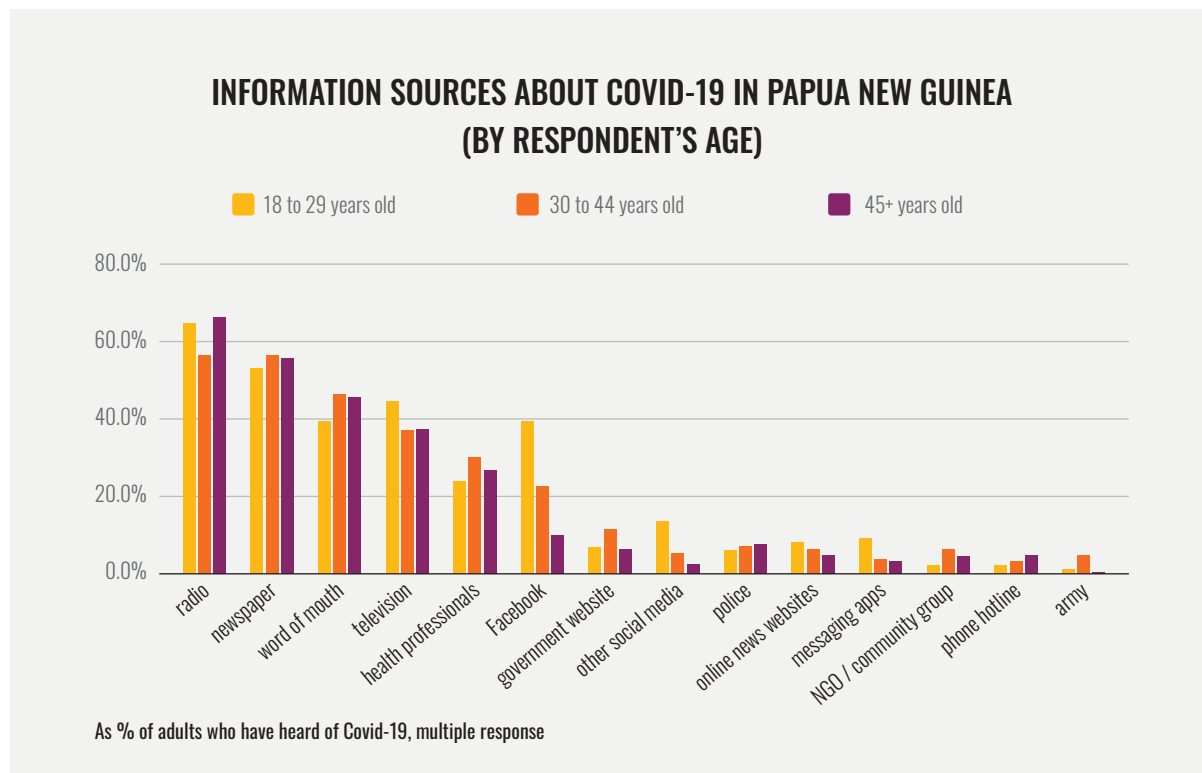
The survey also found differences in beliefs according to education level, perhaps because education affected how well they understood the information that was shared by health authorities. The World Bank reports that the literacy rate for Papua

New Guinea was approximately 67% in 2015 and growing at a rate of about 5%, so while local media and authorities are making efforts to disseminate information about the pandemic, education still plays a significant role in comprehension and receptiveness to messaging. About 23% of participants with no formal education or primary school education claimed that Covid-19 is a hoax, compared to 16% of participants with a high school or technical education and just 9% of those with a university-level education.

In addition, nearly two in five people surveyed think avoiding mobile phone towers can help prevent the spread of the virus. The percentage of respondents who hold this misperception is particularly high in Southern and Islands regions and urban parts of Papua New Guinea. More than 40% of respondents in these areas held inaccurate views on the virus. Notably, approximately three in ten respondents who have a university-level education also think avoiding mobile phone towers is one way to prevent against Covid-19. Considered a predominantly Christian country, many respondents in Papua New Guinea also believed that prayer would protect them from the virus. Respondents were able to select multiple responses to this question.



Information ecosystems



The most common sources of Covid-19 information in Papua New Guinea included mainstream media, word of mouth, health professionals, and Facebook. For simplified, yet analytical information, most people turned to news media, especially radio, television and the daily newspapers (*The National and Post Courier*). According to the survey results, 62.4% had obtained information about Covid-19 from radio, 55% from newspapers and 40.1% from television in the week preceding the survey.

Traditional media outlets were quick to prioritize news relating to the virus. Television stations created live specials that aired two or three times during the day, reporting on the contents of press conferences and interviews with government representatives, then compiling and summarizing the latest information on their evening bulletins. Local AM/FM radio stations, which are generally the most reliable media in rural communities (where 80% of the country's population lives), disseminated Covid-19 information on frequent rotation, often in local languages.

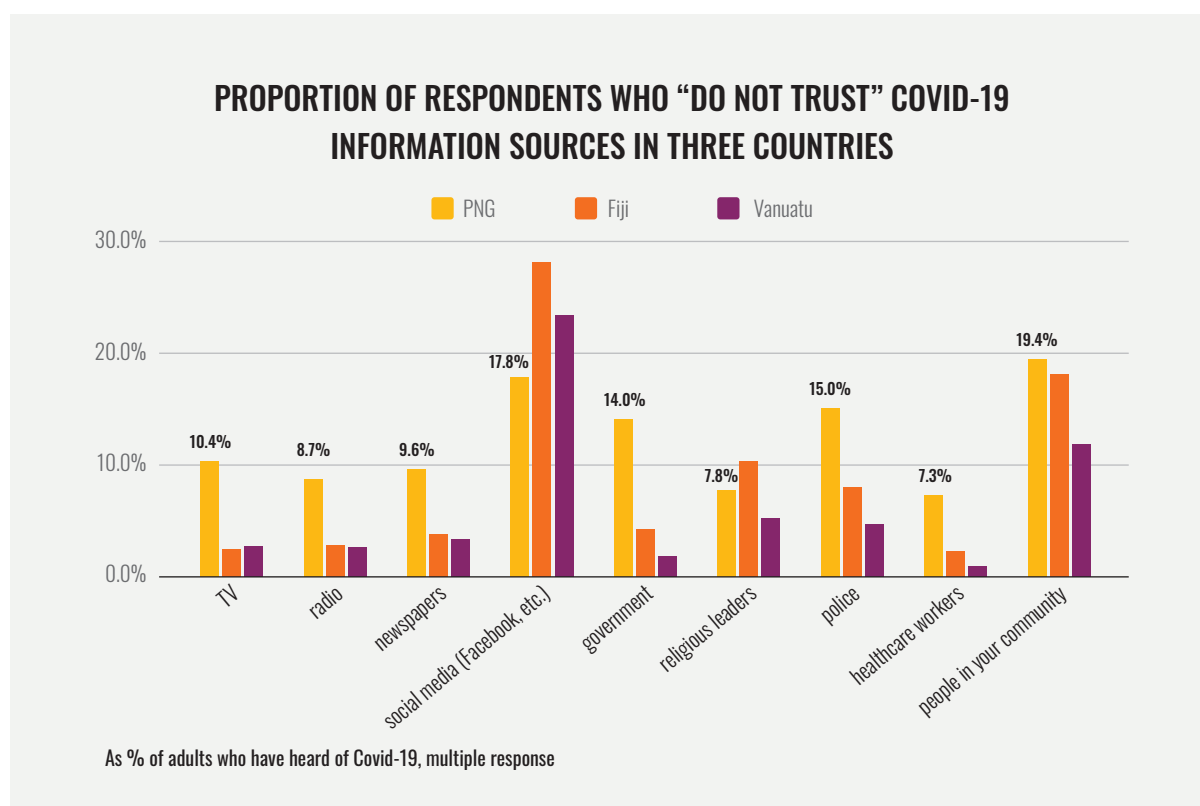
Official information about the Covid-19 pandemic has been disseminated to the public through press briefings held by Prime Minister James Marape and the Covid-19 National Control Centre. The National Control Centre also established a Facebook page and website to share live updates to the people after the government declared a State of Emergency. Press conferences and daily social media updates from the Papua New Guinea Department of Health and the World Health Organisation relayed consistent information about the virus and how to avoid contracting it. The material was disseminated in the country's three main languages—English, Tok Pisin and Motu—and featured images to help people understand the messages.

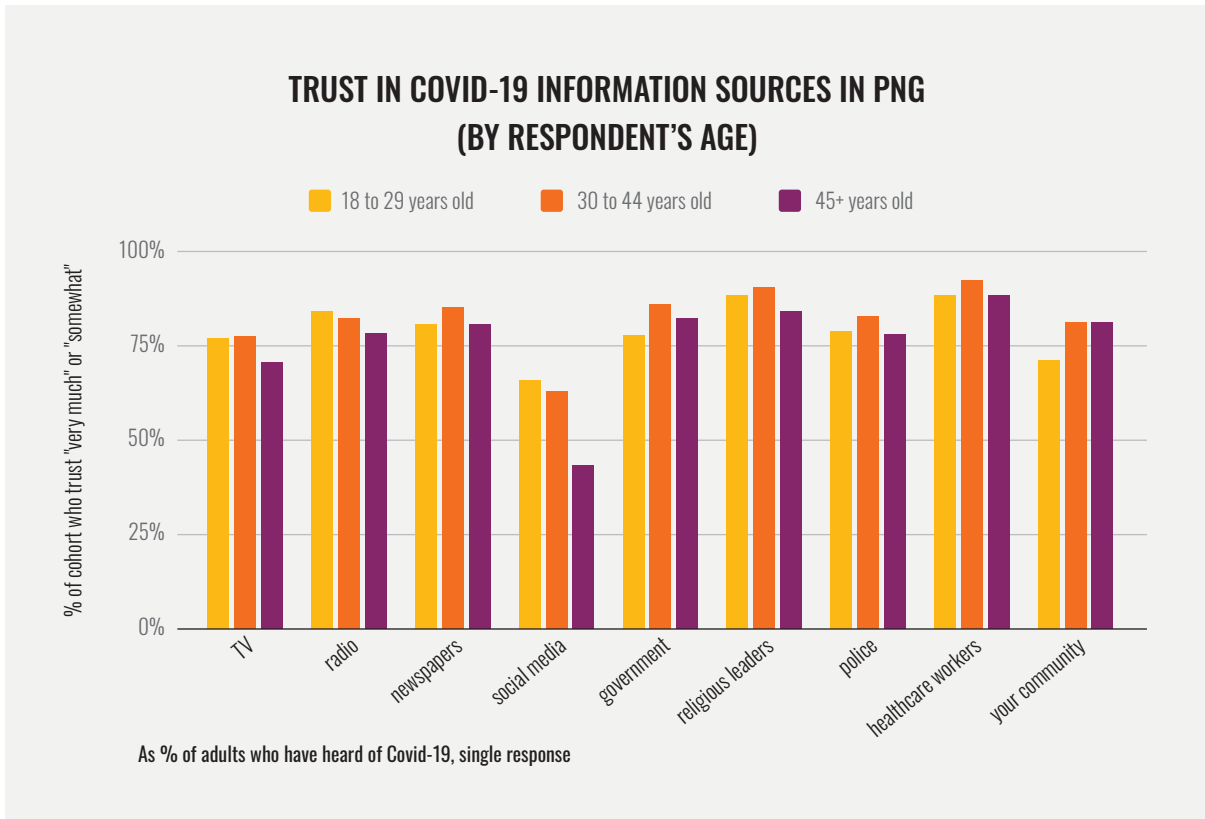
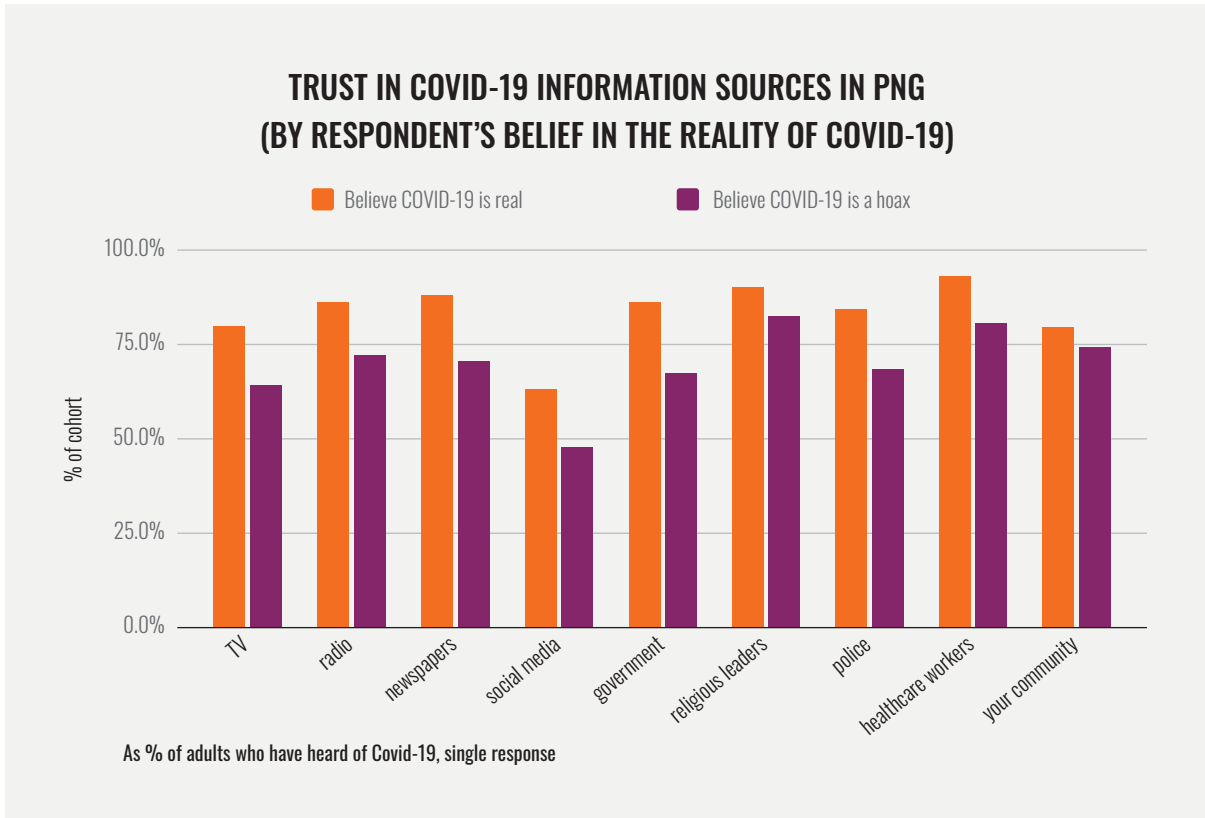
Facebook was another common source for information, though its use skews toward more educated populations. Members of the Papua New Guinea parliament are quite active on the platform. Using hashtags such as #PNG and/or #Covid19, politicians' posts went viral nationally and had a significant impact on public discourse. Additionally, medical doctors and scientists from the Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research were known to share information occasionally, albeit mostly unofficial opinions and medical advice through personal social media accounts that were shared virally.

However, the information ecosystem in Papua New Guinea encountered a number of challenges during the outbreak of Covid-19. The lack of scientific and medical literacy

within the media community posed a major hindrance to newsrooms seeking to cover the pandemic. In addition, the relationship between the government and the media has often been strained. Covid-19 press briefings were paused at one point during the earlier stages of the pandemic, leading the Media Council to call for greater transparency.²¹ Meanwhile, the media’s reporting on the use of funds allocated for Covid-19 response was called into question by the country’s Police Minister, who wrote on his popular Facebook page that particular journalists “can’t be trusted.”²²

These events, along with a number of other disputes between public officials that played out over the course of the pandemic, likely contributed to the Papua New Guinea public’s distrust of and dissatisfaction with essentially every information source on Covid-19. Except for religious leaders, healthcare workers, and social media, each type of information source was rated lower in trust and satisfaction in Papua New Guinea than in Fiji and Vanuatu. Trust was even lower among those Papua Guineans who believed that Covid-19 was a hoax.

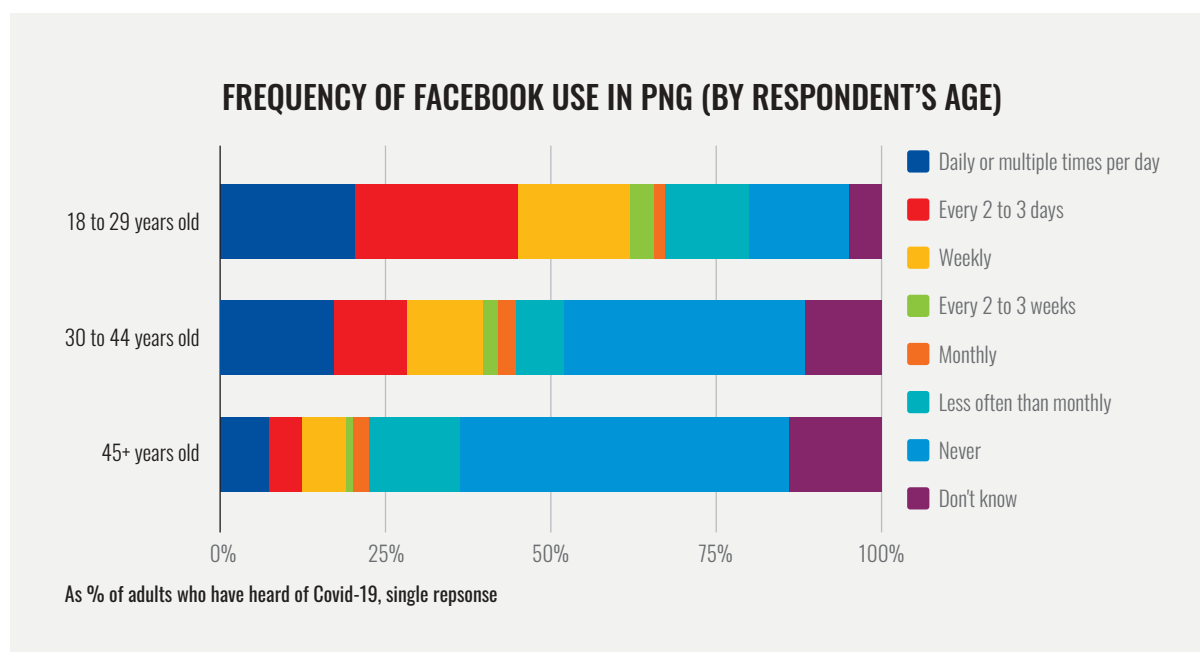


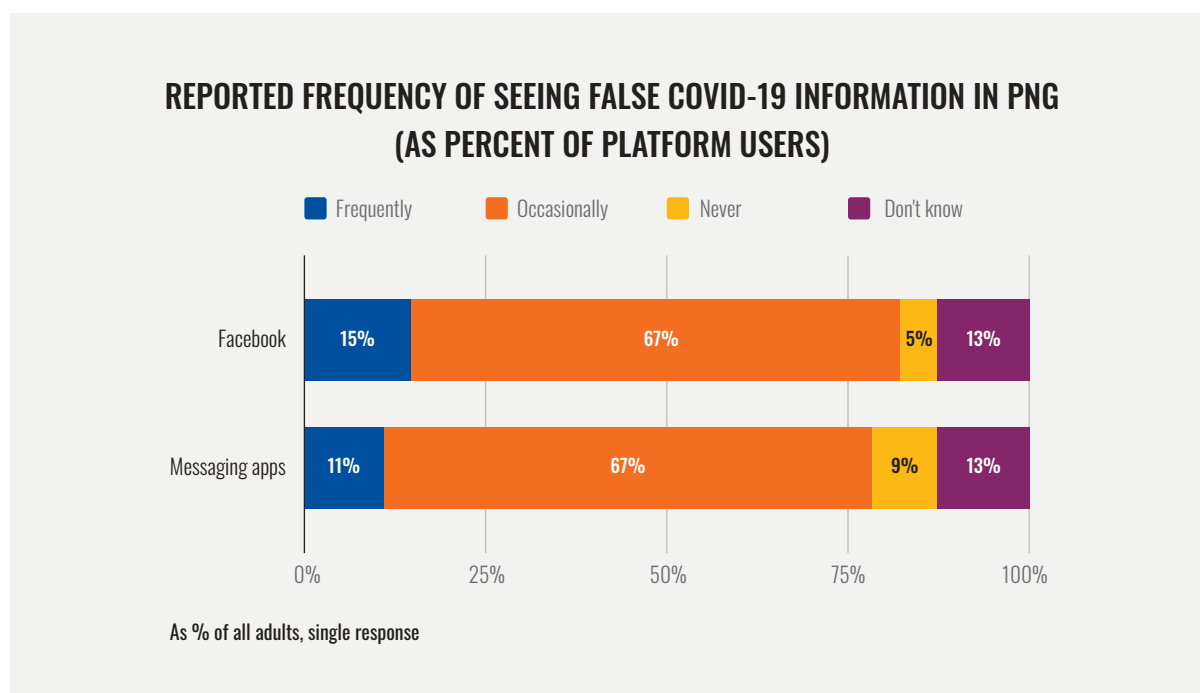


For young people in Papua New Guinea (under 30 years old), the level of trust and satisfaction they felt in the Covid-19 information they saw on social media (66% trusted it “very much” or “somewhat”) was only slightly less than the trust and satisfaction they felt regarding Covid-19 information they heard from their own community (71% trusted it “very much” or “somewhat”). Older people, on the other hand, expressed markedly less trust in social media. This difference is significant because it may indicate one way that social media is changing the dynamics of communal networks that traditionally form the basis of trust in Papua New Guinea. For a young person to put as much trust in social media platforms as they do their local community connections—even if only for Covid-19 information—says a great deal about the influence these platforms have among younger members of the country’s society.

Trends in Online Covid-19 Narratives in Papua New Guinea

Facebook has played an important role in driving conversations around Covid-19 in Papua New Guinea. But it has also hosted viral falsehoods, posts that stigmatize Covid-19 patients in the country and various conspiracy theories that undermine truthful messaging from official sources.





Overall, 82% of social media users in Papua New Guinea say they “frequently” or “occasionally” see information on Facebook that is partly or totally untrue, according to the national survey data. To understand what kind of content they might be seeing, the research team analyzed hundreds of Covid-related posts and comments from multiple large Facebook groups in 2020. While not a comprehensive summary, this analysis provides a sense of the types of online narratives and posts that have gained traction in the country.

Surge of harmful and misleading content

The Covid-19 outbreak naturally caused a surge of Facebook posts related to health, but with few trusted information sources, commentary was often confused, misleading or simply false. While some doctors and medical experts attempted to use the platform to promote healthy practices, they were outnumbered by commenters with tenuous claims to expertise through a friend or relative, anecdotal experience, a degree in a field outside of medicine or epidemiology, or a vested interest in promoting alternative medicine. Peddlers of unscientific “cures” such as bleach and antimalarial drugs; racial profiling of people of Asian descent; suggestions that the pandemic is an “act of God” and the people dying are purging the earth; and speculation about the unique strength of the Papua New Guinean immune system all found an enthusiastic audience in large Facebook groups in the country.

SARS-COV-2 AKA COVID-19 THE BIGGEST SCAM DESIGNED TO DESTROY COUNTRIES, ECONOMIES AND INDIVIDUAL LIVES!!

Like I said that SARS-COV-2 have been devised and orchestrated by the filthy rich individuals and corporations using WHO as their vehicle.

[...]

Vaccination is not needed when the recovery rate is almost to 99% and case fatality of less than 0.025-0.05 in most of the countries.

Where is the scientific basis for vaccination? Nothing really.

Governments and citizens must rise against SARS-COV-2 vaccination in PNG.

Reposted in multiple PNG Facebook groups and attributed to a doctor:

When government officials or other authority figures attempted to correct misconceptions or falsehoods, they were often dismissed or criticized by commentators. For example, in a story posted on the PNG Daily Facebook page, the governor of Gulf Province was quoted describing his own experience recovering from Covid-19, under the headline, “COVID-19 IS REAL.” The post was shared more than 150 times and received nearly 300 comments, the bulk of which were skeptical or mocking. While some comments reflected common political grievances, a significant proportion questioned the governor’s account based on misconceptions about the differences between treatments, cures and vaccines.

The good governor of Gulf, if you have recovered from Covid-19 by taking double doses? Can you please ask your doctor to do the same to others who are also going through the same situation as you were. May be the WHO will declare that our good governor’s doctor has found the cure..

Seems like our medical team are curing people from Covid 19, can the Government send some of our health workers to help work in Covid 19 affected countries?? 😊😊😊

And you recovered WITHOUT a vaccine. Well done,bravo 🙌🙌🙌 now can we carry on with our lives 🙌 Stop being dramatic about it.

Skepticism of Covid-19 runs so deep in Papua New Guinea social media discourse that even Facebook's own efforts to stem the misinformation were the subject of mockery in some large Papua New Guinean groups. Facebook groups—especially the very large ones that influence mainstream discourse in Papua New Guinea—are essentially semi-public spaces managed by small groups of “administrators” with the ability to admit and remove members, while also being subject to some of Facebook's automated anti-spam and anti-misinformation controls. Facebook has committed to removing certain types of false and harmful content about Covid-19 on its platform. But its algorithms cannot parse languages such as Tok Pisin, making it easier for people to evade detection simply by posting exclusively in that language. Enforcement of platform policies in Pacific countries is therefore largely dependent on proactive reporting from users themselves. In some groups, administrators and members are actively opposed to these measures. In one group of more than 40,000 members, administrators even posted a “warning for all members” encouraging them to post in Tok Pisin in order to avoid Facebook's false news detection measures:

ADMIN NOTICE AND WARNING FOR ALL MEMBERS.. PLEASE POST IN TOK PISIN

FACEBOOK IS NOW FACT CHECKING ANY POST LINK WITH COVID19 AND THIS GROUP IS AT THE RISK OF BEING REDUCED TO THE LOWEST IN TERMS OF NEWS FEEDS, IE. IF YOU ARE A MEMBER YOU WILL NOT FIND ANY NEW POST LINKED TO THIS PAGE, THIS COMES AS A RESULT OF MEMBERS WHO CONTINUALLY POST UNVERIFIED NEWS ARTICLES LINKED WITH THE COVID PANDEMIC, I HAVE POSTED A BREACH NOTICE BELOW AFTER SOME PEOPLE KEEP POSTING LINKS, MEMBERS, MODERATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS IT IS OUR DUTY TO KEEP THIS FORUM OPEN, IF WE CONTINUE THIS PATH OF POSTING UNVERIFIED LINKS AND NEWS, WE STAND TO LOSE OUR PAGE, WE HAVE NO CONTROL OVER WHAT PEOPLE POST, EVERYONE SHOULD USE THEIR HEAD TO MAKE SURE WHAT YOU POST IS GENUINE. WE NEED MORE MODERATORS ON THIS PAGE, IF YOU THINK YOU CAN ASSIST PLEASE CONTACT ME.

Harassment and slander against Covid-19 patients

Other Covid-19 patients in Papua New Guinea also experienced online mockery and direct harassment. A few hours before news of the first Covid-19 case in Papua New

Guinea broke—a woman from the New Guinea Islands region—rumours had begun circulating about a potential first case. Social media users had begun spreading incorrect information about the location and sex of the patient. Panic and fear ensued, and many resented the idea of another lockdown, especially a month after the first. This caused division and anger amongst users and open resentment to the as-yet-unnamed patient. When news officially broke of the country’s second case, a patient in East New Britain Province, the woman in question was criticised and details of her life openly discussed online. Photos of her were published in online groups, accompanied by derogatory posts. Rumours also circulated that health workers and caregivers working at the hospital she was admitted in had stopped working and left due to fears they may contract the virus. This social stigma persisted for days before the second positive case was announced.

Influence of politicians

While celebrities in other countries are popular online influencers, advocating for fans to wear masks and social distance, that is not the case in Papua New Guinea. It is the members of the country’s parliament house and provincial governors who are the heavyweights that dominate the “influencer” scene. Most, if not all, of Papua New Guinea’s political leaders have Facebook accounts that they control themselves, none of which are marked as “verified” on the platform. These accounts allow them to remove “middlemen”—such as the media and political press—and relay information or share opinions directly with their constituents.

While this approach has its advantages, a direct and unfiltered channel of communication can be damaging to the public’s understanding of an issue if the politician disseminates information that contradicts the advice of health authorities. It can also cause rifts within the political establishment. In Papua New Guinea, one notable dispute broke out between two cabinet members: Police Minister Bryan Kramer and Health Minister Jelta Wong. Kramer has an exceptionally large and devoted following on his personal Facebook page, where he posts lengthy updates about Covid-19 and other current events, and he is frequently quoted in the mainstream media. Meanwhile, Wong’s online following is much more limited. In March 2020, seemingly contradictory messages issued independently by Kramer, Wong and the Prime Minister about the Covid-19 test results for an Australian man working in Morobe province led to public confusion and distrust.²³ Shortly thereafter, Wong announced that Kramer had been “contained” and would no longer provide official updates on Covid-19 in the country.²⁴ Still, even as the government attempted

to centralize Covid-19 messaging through officially-sanctioned websites, Facebook pages and press briefings, personal posts from politicians remain a significant driver of online conversations about the pandemic.

Implications for Vaccine Acceptance and Covid-19 Recovery

The convergence of socioeconomic, educational, geographic and political factors in Papua New Guinea have produced a situation wherein about 16% of the population—mostly those with less education—believe that Covid-19 is a hoax; false and harmful narratives proliferate in social media groups, mostly unchecked; and a small but significant proportion of the population are distrustful of any and all information sources about the pandemic. This poses real risks for Covid-19 vaccine rollout in the country that go beyond the basic infrastructure challenges associated with storing and transporting vials.

First, vaccine-related messaging will need to be designed to address many diverse audiences. Papua New Guinea is famously diverse, with hundreds of languages spoken across its broad geography. Vaccine messaging should certainly be localized to ensure awareness within each linguistic community. But these survey results suggest another type of subgroup in Papua New Guinea: the “Covid-19 deniers” who are distrustful of authoritative information about the virus and dismissive of the threat it may pose to their community. These people may increasingly turn to Papua New Guinea’s social media communities that echo their views. Crafting messaging that will convince this skeptical group will require great care and nuance. Working collaboratively with the conduits of information that still retain these individuals’ trust, such as religious and community leaders, may prove more effective than one-size-fits-all approaches to raising awareness about the vaccine.

Second, centralizing and streamlining official vaccine information will help to promote acceptance. Trust in public messaging about Covid-19 was visibly damaged by disputes and disjointed messaging between ostensibly authoritative sources in the first half of 2020, leading the Papua New Guinea National Covid-19 Control Centre to create unified websites, hotlines and social media pages that provide up-to-date and officially-validated information on the pandemic. Press briefings held by the prime minister and health minister have informed mainstream media coverage and helped to counteract some misinformation. These outlets can help centralize and streamline

vaccine messaging as well, in order to avoid the kind of disconnected or disjointed official messaging that quickly erodes public trust.

Third, technical agencies, community groups and social media companies will need to find new ways of limiting online conspiracy theories in Papua New Guinea. All major social media companies have committed to removing or limiting false and harmful information about Covid-19 vaccines and elevating authoritative fact-checks and reports, but enforcing these policies relies on partnerships and infrastructure that do not exist or do not operate effectively in Papua New Guinea. Enforcement of platform policies has been inconsistent in Papua New Guinea so far, and social media has already been used to harass patients, promote false and pseudo-scientific theories, and spread doubts about the validity of official information. Furthermore, this research project identified at least one group whose administrators explicitly encouraged members to circumvent Facebook's automated moderation features by writing about Covid-19 exclusively in Tok Pisin, which, again, the company's algorithms cannot properly parse. Collaborative efforts between civil society groups, government technical agencies and platform companies may be the only viable way to address this growing problem.

COVID-19 NARRATIVES IN VANUATU

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

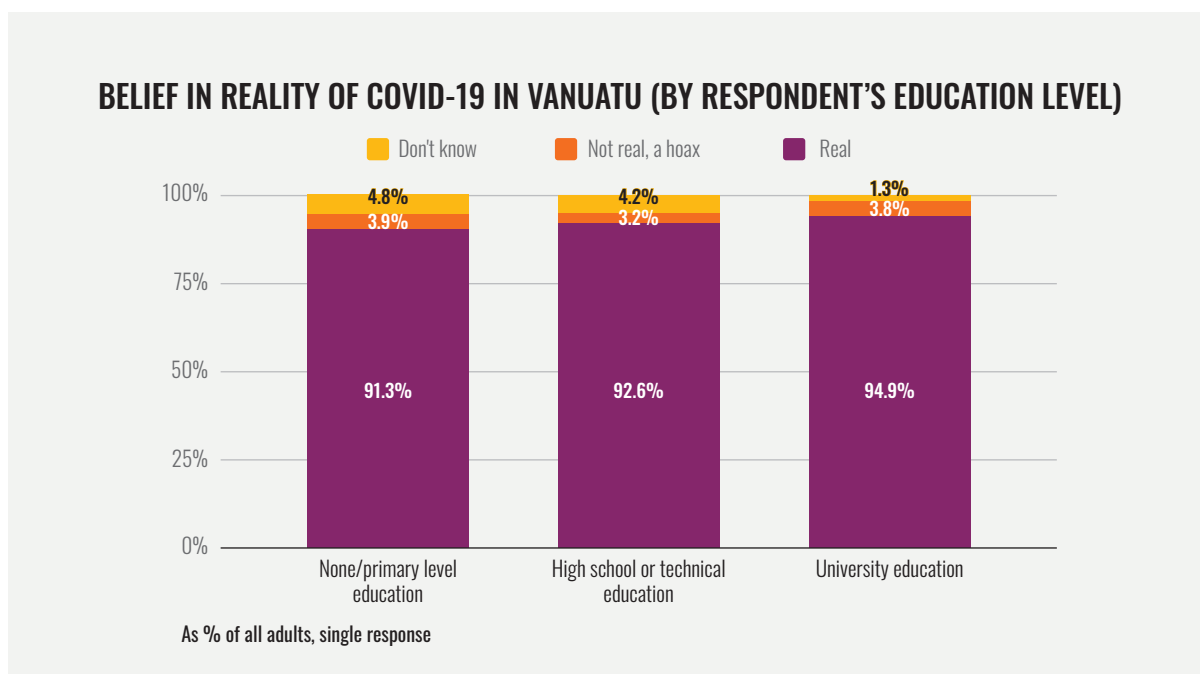
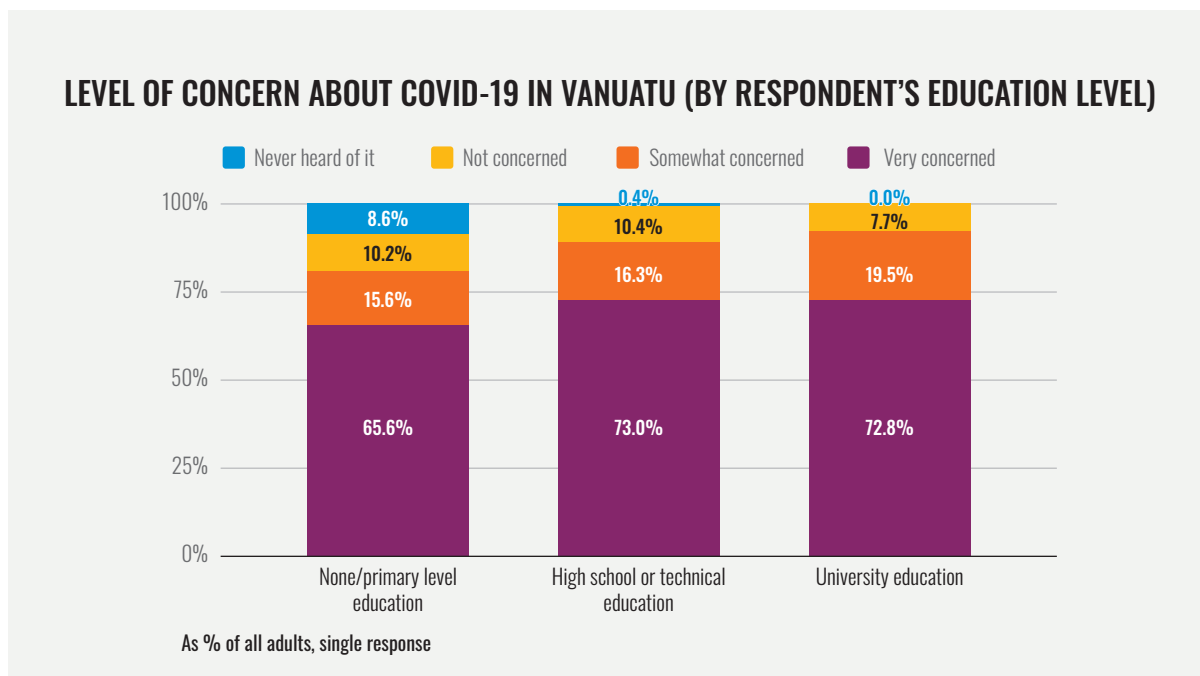
In Vanuatu, belief that the pandemic is a “hoax” is very low, and awareness of key protective measures is high. Vanuatu had yet to experience a local Covid-19 case when the survey was carried out, and false and harmful information appears to have had a limited spread in the country. Ni-Vanuatu communities are generally aware of Covid-19 and concerned about it, and only a very small minority of respondents in this nationally representative survey believed that the virus was “not real or a hoax.”

Facebook plays a major role as a conduit of Covid-19 news and information in Vanuatu, but may also help spread some false and harmful beliefs. Beliefs in specious Covid-19 prevention measures—including avoiding cold foods, taking chloroquine, and consuming traditional foods and beverages—were more prevalent among survey respondents who had read about Covid-19 on Facebook within the past week. This effect was especially noticeable among younger cohorts, who use social media more heavily. Other types of misinformation that emerged in 2020 centered around the safety measures for repatriation flights bringing back ni-Vanuatu workers, which will be a continuing issue for the country.

Vanuatu’s relatively small and close-knit online communities are closely monitored by government authorities and respected health experts who seek to limit the spread of false and harmful theories. The government of Vanuatu, local organizations and some prominent physicians provide regular updates and clarifications on Facebook, which helps inform discussions in the country’s relatively small and close-knit online community. This is partly by necessity: since users in Vanuatu write primarily in Bislama, social media companies can do little to monitor local content, and messages from overseas are sometimes mistranslated. In addition, since Vanuatu has avoided a major outbreak of Covid-19 so far—and other events, including severe cyclones, have diverted public attention, online discourse has not been quite as focused on the pandemic as elsewhere, reducing the need for extensive government intervention regarding Covid-specific falsehoods.

Covid-19 Awareness & Public Perceptions in Vanuatu

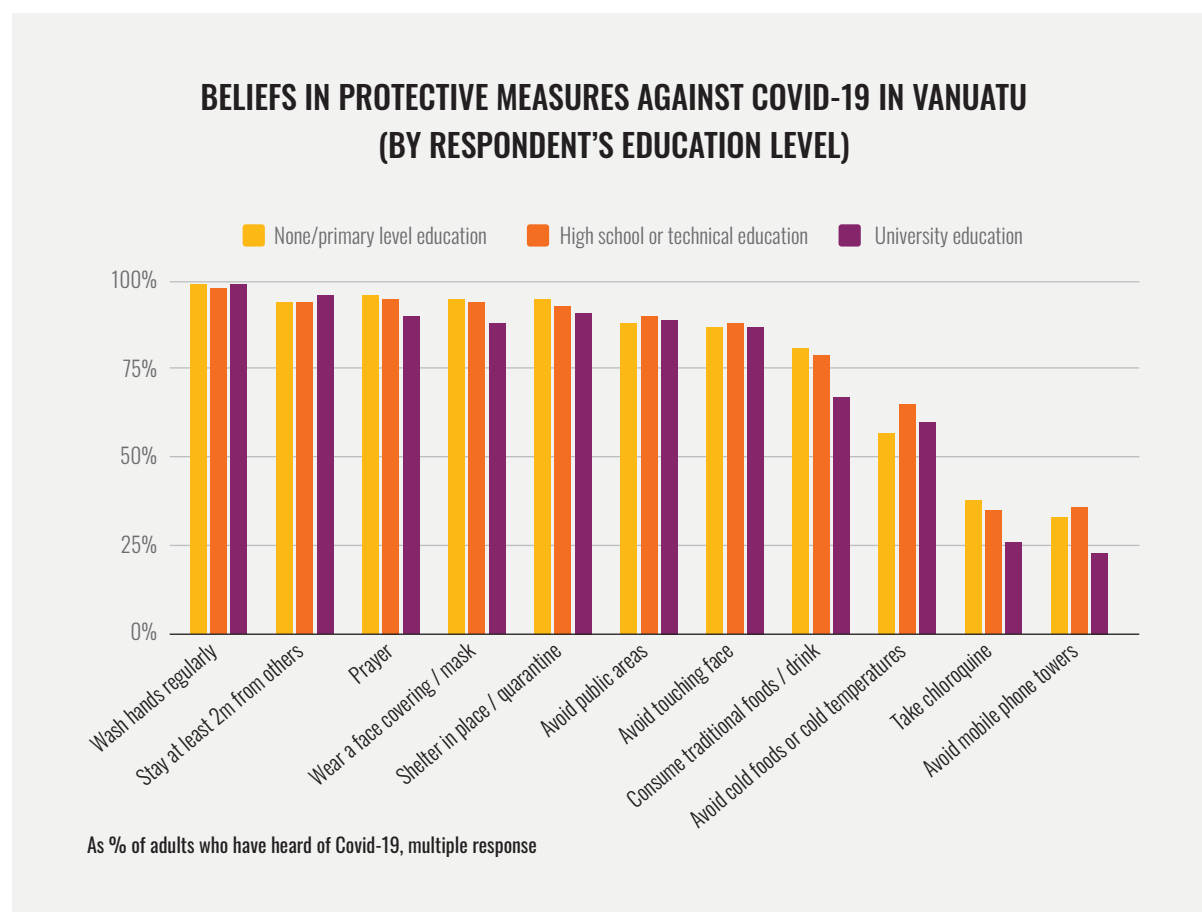
The survey results in Vanuatu show a high degree of concern around Covid-19 and relatively high awareness of the pandemic, despite no cases of infection having been identified in Vanuatu at the time. In response to the question “Are you concerned about the threat of COVID-19 to your community?,” 87.6% of respondents chose “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned,” compared to a total of 88.2% in Fiji and 81.4% in Papua New Guinea. Men are more likely to be unconcerned than women—19% of men are “not concerned” vs 14% of women. Among respondents who had never heard of the virus, almost all had only a primary-level education or less.



The level of belief that Covid-19 is real is very high in Vanuatu: 92.6% say it is real, and only 3.6% responded that they believed it to be a hoax. This is lower than in both Fiji (5.9%) and Papua New Guinea (16.4%).

When it comes to awareness of measures that people can take to prevent becoming infected with Covid-19, the data indicates a very high level of penetration of some of the key public health messages. This is especially the case when it comes to washing hands regularly with soap and water, social distancing, staying at home (quarantine/sheltering in place) and wearing a face covering. Unsurprisingly, given that Vanuatu is a strongly Christian country, there was a very high belief that prayer was also a means of avoiding infection, with 94.4% selecting this response. Respondents were able to select multiple responses to this survey question.

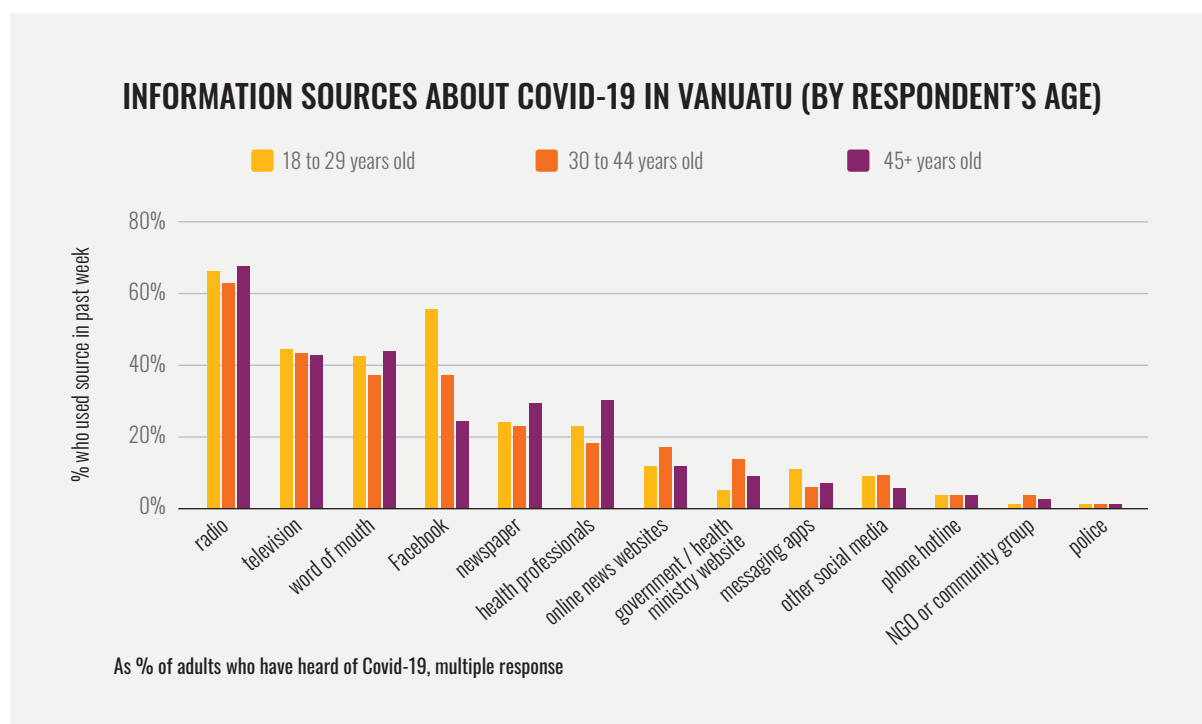
Other beliefs about what can prevent infection did not score as highly, but neither were they negligible. These beliefs include scientifically disproven measures such as taking chloroquine and avoiding mobile phone towers. It is worth noting that in Vanuatu, people may be more likely to be aware of chloroquine than in other countries because of broad public knowledge of its use in treating malaria.

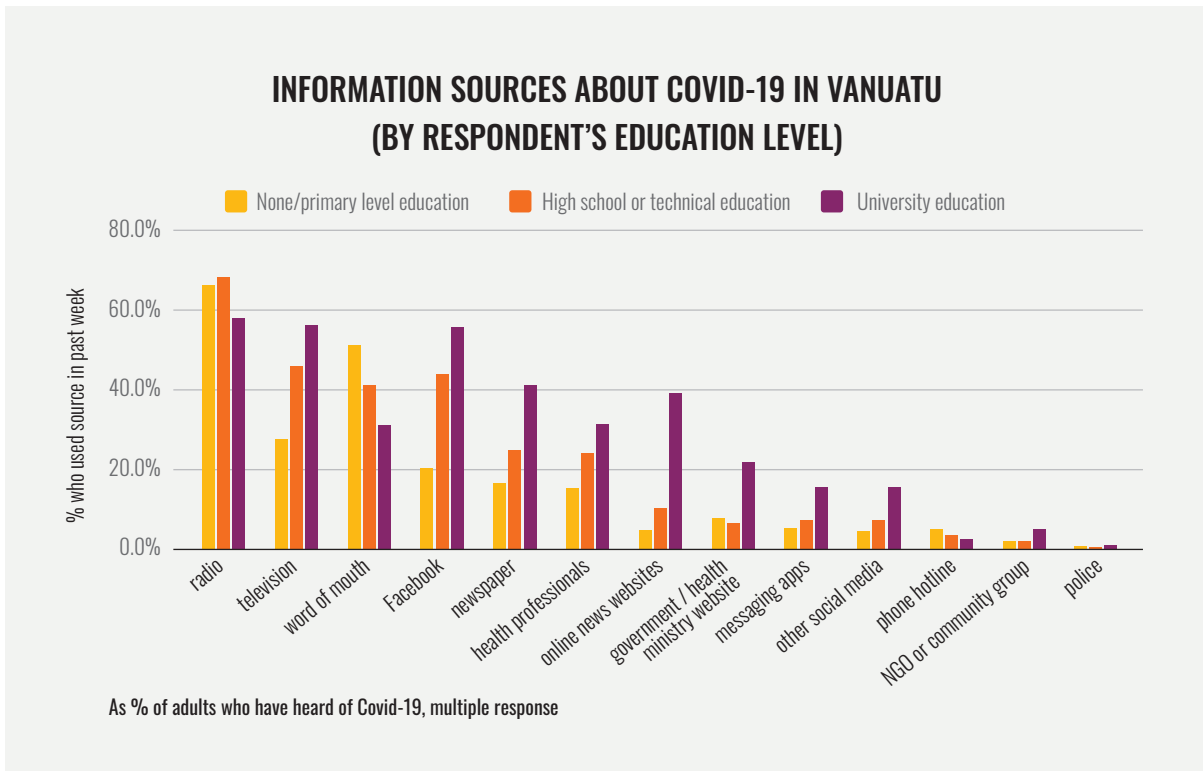


Information ecosystems

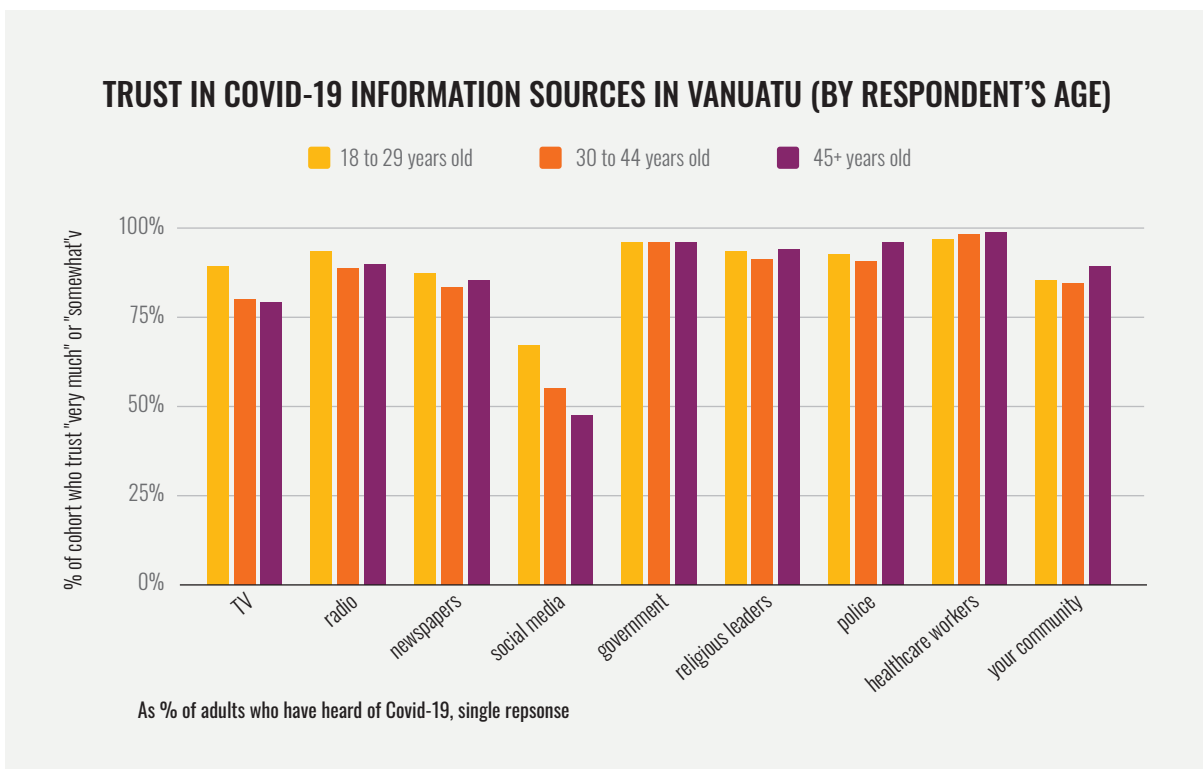
When it comes to where people get their information, the most common source is radio (65.5%). The next three most used sources of information are television (43.8%), word of mouth (42.2%) and Facebook (40.6%). Other social media sources, such as Twitter or TikTok, are by comparison rarely mentioned. Notably, 23% of respondents mentioned receiving their information from health professionals.

The use of Facebook varies across age groups, locations and education levels. Women are slightly more likely to use the platform weekly than men; the 18–29 age group use it more than others; it is used more in urban areas than in rural locations; and those who have university-level education are more frequent users than those with lower levels of education.

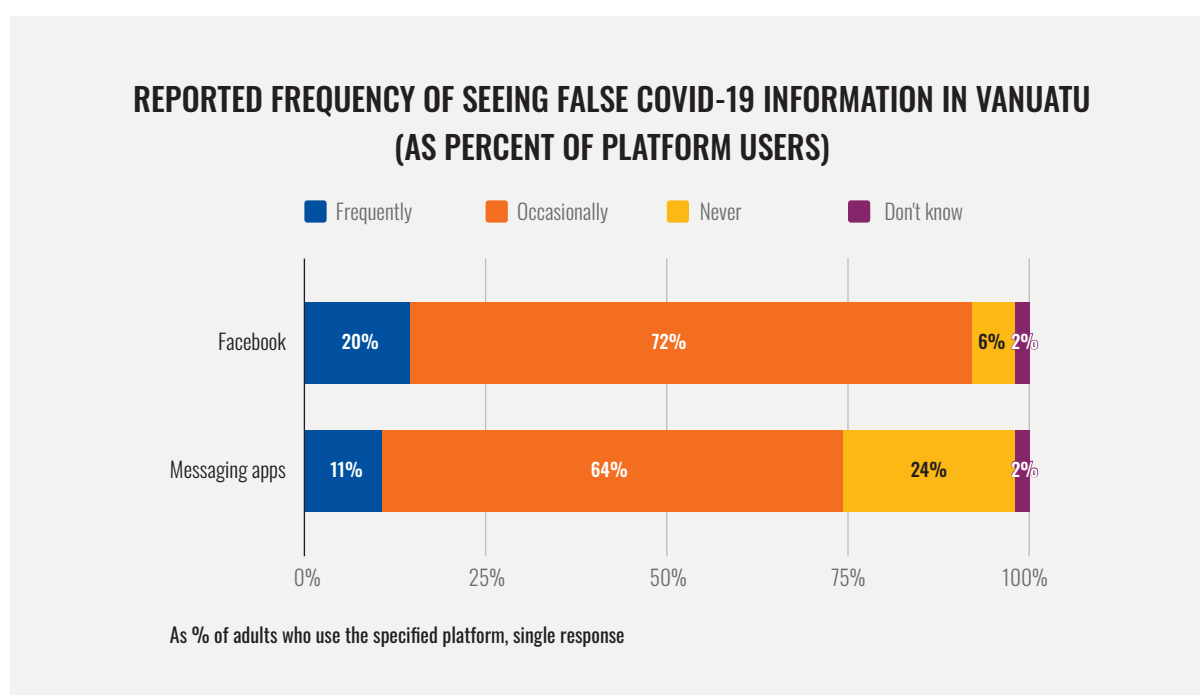




Overall, people in Vanuatu report that they are satisfied with and trust the traditional information sources (radio, television, newspapers and word of mouth) to find out information about COVID-19. However, levels of both satisfaction and trust drop markedly, especially among older respondents, when asked to rate information sourced from Facebook and other social media.

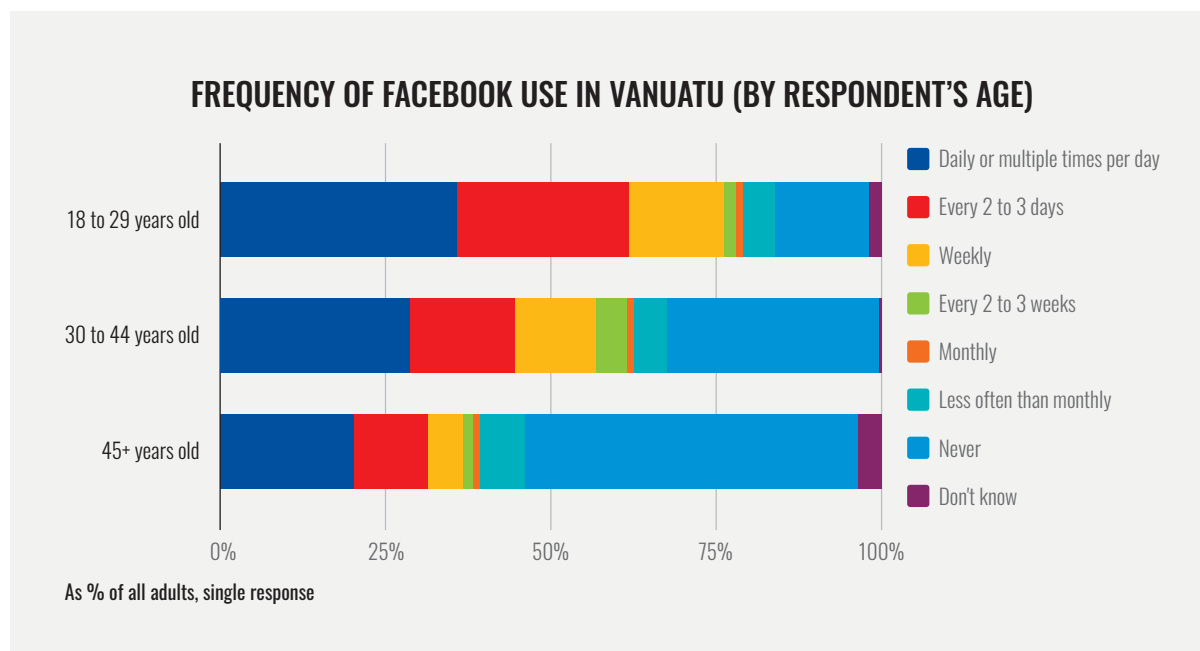


When it comes to levels of trust in information posted on Facebook and in messaging applications, 91.9% of respondents who use these platforms report having seen something on Facebook relating to Covid-19 that seems to be partly or completely untrue. This aligns closely with the responses that were obtained in Fiji (90.6%) and is higher than the result in Papua New Guinea (82.1%).



In terms of what people do when they come across what they consider to be flawed information on social media, their most common response is to do nothing, whether it occurs on Facebook (81.4%) or in a messaging app (83%).

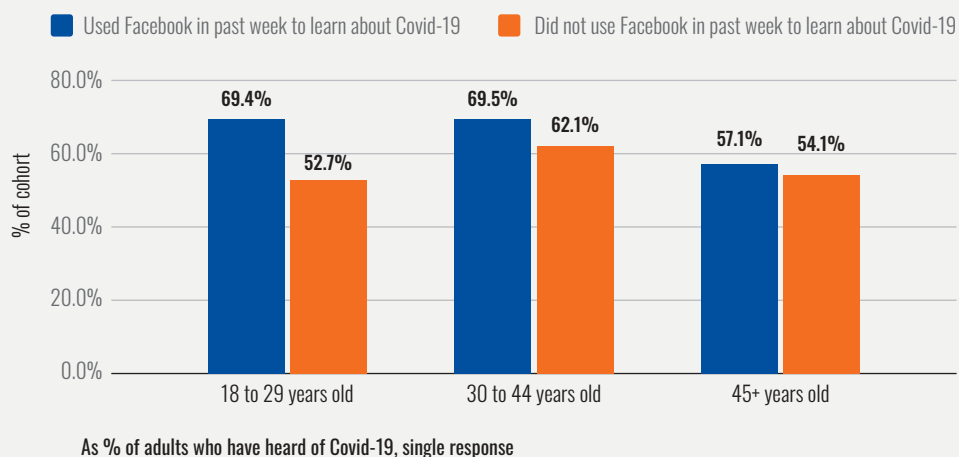
The survey showed that 30% of ni-Vanuatu respondents do not use Facebook as a source of information, and 35% do not use any messaging applications. Taken together with the 23% of respondents who do not trust social media as a source of Covid-19 information, these findings have implications for developing strategies to inform people about COVID-19 or other matters of public concern. Adopting a messaging campaign that relies heavily on the use of social media may fail to directly reach a significant portion of the population, one which may include the most vulnerable citizens and those most in need of accurate and reliable information. Nonetheless, social media remains an important conduit of information. Information disseminated through Facebook may still reach individuals who do not use Facebook themselves, indirectly via other members of their community, including religious leaders.



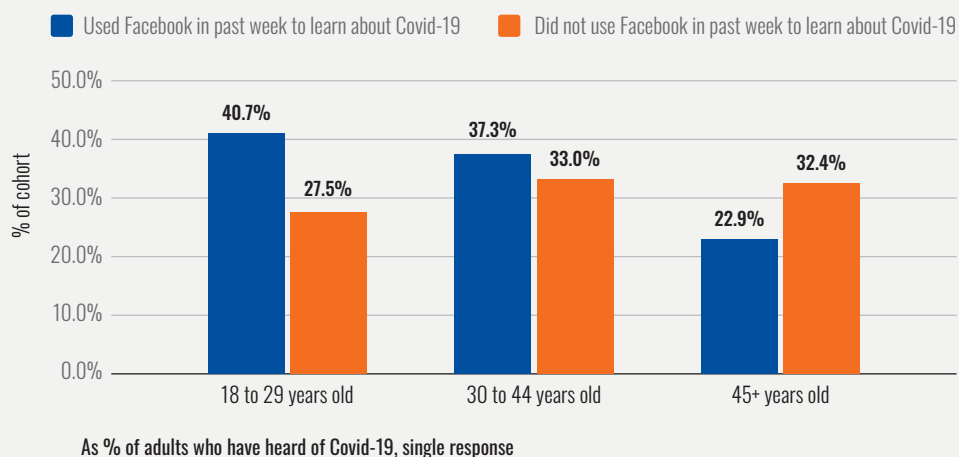
The survey found that Facebook users in Vanuatu may be more likely to believe in unproven prevention measures, such as avoiding cold foods and cold temperatures, taking chloroquine, and consuming traditional foods and drinks. However, there was no clear relationship between Facebook use and the belief that avoiding phone towers could help prevent infection, suggesting that this message is either not as widespread in Vanuatu as in Fiji and Papua New Guinea or that it has been countered more effectively here.

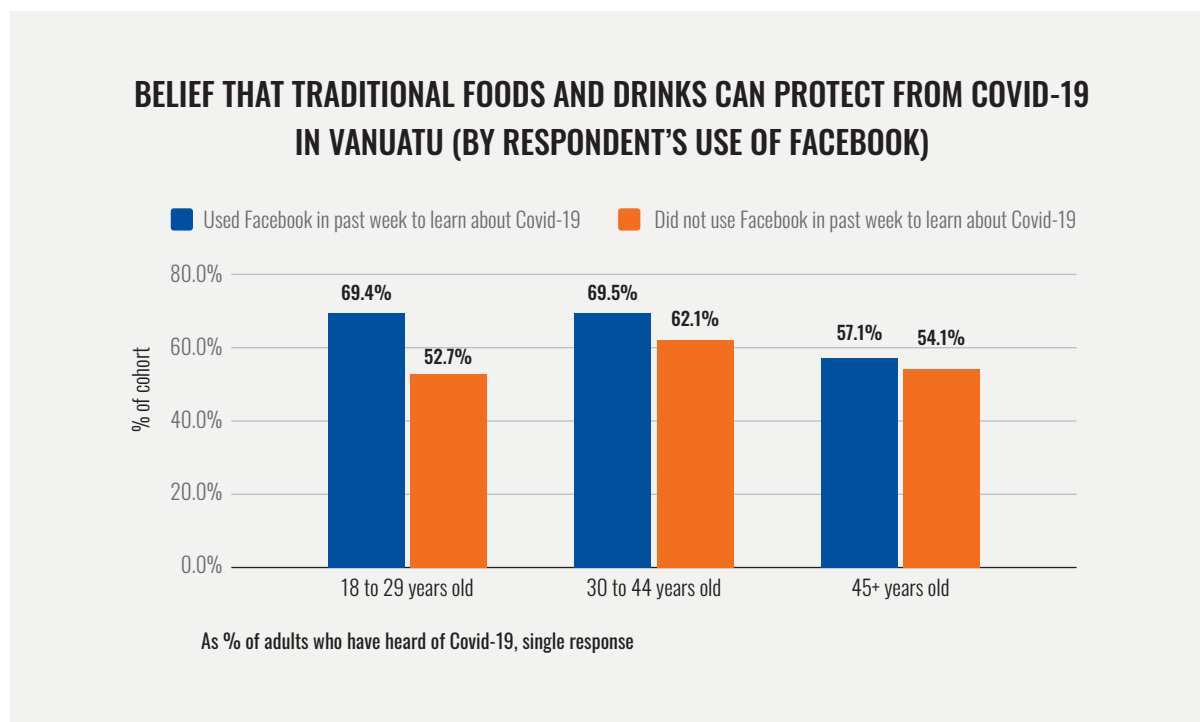
In comparison to Fiji, where younger people exposed to Facebook tended to be less likely than older cohorts to believe certain false or unsubstantiated claims about protection measures, Vanuatu shows a trend in the other direction. Younger people (18–29 years old) who recently found Covid-19 information on Facebook were more likely to believe that cold foods should be avoided and that chloroquine can help, while their older counterparts (45+ years old) were equally or less likely to believe these theories. It is possible that these trends simply reflect a likelihood that inexperienced or less educated social media users are more likely to be convinced by speculative or unsubstantiated claims. In Vanuatu, these users are younger, while in Fiji, they are older.

BELIEF THAT AVOIDING COLD FOODS AND TEMPERATURES CAN PROTECT FROM COVID-19 IN VANUATU (BY RESPONDENT'S USE OF FACEBOOK)



BELIEF THAT TAKING CHLOROQUINE CAN PROTECT FROM COVID-19 IN VANUATU (BY RESPONDENT'S USE OF FACEBOOK)





Trends in Online Covid-19 Narratives in Vanuatu

It is important to note that the publication and dissemination of information about Covid-19 in Vanuatu was set against a unique backdrop in the Pacific island region. In the State of Emergency orders that were issued by the President on March 26, the following stipulation was included: “all media outlets must not publish any article on Covid-19 unless it has received the authorisation of the national disaster management office after consultation with the World Health Organisation”. Although the government sought to clarify this by saying that the concern only related to information spread on social media, the provision was so broadly worded as to encompass all forms of media.²⁵

In addition, a number of non-Covid events overtook the national conversation. In April, the northern part of the country was severely impacted by Tropical Cyclone Harold (which also affected the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga). This event intersected with Covid-19 as the restrictions in place as a result of the State of Emergency had a direct impact on the response to the cyclone. As the year moved on, other events, such as the 40th anniversary of the country’s independence and its graduation from “Least Developed Country” status were marked with little or no

reference to Covid-19. References that were made were predominantly focused on the pandemic's ongoing economic impact, rather than its implications on public health.

Identifiable “spikes” of conversation and concern around the pandemic showcase the confusion and misinformation that sometimes spread through Facebook. For example, when the first repatriation flight arrived, questions proliferated across social media about how quarantine would work; later, when the first case in the country was identified, confusion and fear about patient privacy and contact tracing fanned across Facebook.

As in other places, such as Samoa, Fiji and PNG, the announcement of the “first case” in Vanuatu prompted a vigorous exchange on Facebook around the issue of whether that person should be identified. The government used “Yumi Toktok Stret,” the most popular Facebook group in Vanuatu with more than 117,000 members compared to the total national population of about 300,000, to call for the wider population to respect this person's privacy.²⁶ This was backed by Dr. Basil Leodoro, whose personal contributions to the online discourse have been significant because he is a well-known commentator who is very active on social media and was a candidate in the 2020 elections.

Ni-van wei test positive lo covid19 should takem wan test yesterday 15th Sunday - anyone savi test result yia?

The ni-Vanuatu who tested positive for Covid-19 should have been tested yesterday - anyone know the result here?

Dr. Leodoro: Test results hemi bitwin patient mo dokta blem mo Director blo Pablik Helt. I no bisnis blo pablik

Test results are between the patient and doctor, according to the Director of Public Health. It's not the public's business.

Vanuatu is a multilingual country, with more than one hundred indigenous languages used throughout the nation. While English or French are used in the formal education system, discussions on Facebook are conducted in Bislama, the country's lingua franca, which allows for a wider discussion among a broader audience. However, it also raises challenges in conveying approved messaging from the World Health

Organization or other international organizations, since content must be translated into Bislama to be widely understood and shared. A further challenge is that concepts may become lost in translation. For example, a Facebook post noted that confusion may exist among some non-native English speakers about the fact that a “negative” test is a good thing, whereas a “positive” test is not.

Another challenge is that social media platforms such as Facebook have not invested sufficiently in the ability to monitor posts in Pacific languages, hampering their ability to manage content, whether by way of applying a warning or removing a post. Conversely, platforms may remove posts for reasons that are invalid because of a lack of understanding of the content or the context in which it is being introduced.

In Vanuatu, the government has made good use of both mainstream and online media to provide a steady flow of information about Covid-19 to the community. A dedicated website provides a one-stop shop for information and resources from the Ministry of Health.²⁷ The Ministry’s Facebook page also provides situational reports and updates, including regarding changes to quarantine requirements and repatriation arrangements.²⁸

An early part of the official communication strategy was the production and dissemination of a number of videos produced by Wan Smol Bag theatre group. They are in Bislama and can be shared easily via social media. They are focused on community education around handwashing, how the virus spreads, caring for people who are sick and other issues. Again, they come with the full authorisation of the Ministry of Health. This, in addition to the group’s strong and longstanding reputation in Vanuatu, makes them an important resource for disseminating credible and accessible information.²⁹

Implications for Vaccine Acceptance and Covid-19 Recovery

One of the most significant impacts on the information and discourse surrounding Covid-19 in Vanuatu has been the extremely low number of cases. Whilst there have certainly been elements of confusion and incidents of misinformation, especially on social media, they have not gained traction to the level seen in Fiji, Papua New Guinea or other countries around the world. During the lengthy Covid-19 recovery

and vaccine rollout period, though, there will be “critical junctures” where the need for consistent messaging based on credible, accurate information will be critical to maintaining awareness within the community.

In 2021, a particular juncture that could cause a “spike” in Covid-19 related discussion in both mainstream and social media relates to people entering the country. Vanuatu has already allowed significant numbers of seasonal workers to travel to Australia to take up employment opportunities, predominantly in the agriculture sector.³⁰ Participation in the New Zealand scheme resumed in early 2021.³¹ Whilst there has been some concern about people travelling to countries that have been more affected by Covid-19 than Vanuatu, the discourse has thus far remained muted. However, the level of dialogue is expected to rise, should workers become affected whilst overseas, or if the spread of the disease increases in Australia and New Zealand.

Another trigger for increased conversation and potential confusion may be the implementation of “travel bubbles” among Vanuatu and other countries in the region. The “Tamtam bubble” announced in February 2021 permits a re-opening of the international borders between Vanuatu and New Caledonia to resume tourism and other forms of international travel.³² Additional travel lanes may open with New Zealand and other Covid-free countries in the near future. These events are likely entry points for misreporting or misunderstandings to penetrate the information ecosystem. Confusion and misunderstanding could grow around the government-mandated protocols for people entering the country: must they be tested pre-departure, must they go into quarantine, will they be tracked while they are in the country, will they be allowed to move about within the country during their stay, and so on. When tourism does restart, the government and the industry will need to strike a delicate balance between disseminating key messages and ensuring that any economic gains from the “Tamtam bubble” are shared as widely as possible.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the 2021 conversation, and the one with the most risk when it comes to the potential for confusion and even disinformation, relates to the rollout of vaccines. As in the case for other Pacific island countries, Vanuatu will look to international partners (such as Australia and New Zealand) to provide assistance in procuring supplies and implementing a nationwide vaccination programme. This will require a significant investment in locally-tailored communications and messaging.³³

REGIONAL TRENDS AND OUTLOOK

Periods of great fear and uncertainty often correspond to an influx of false and misleading information online, and the Covid-19 pandemic is no different.³⁴ Falsehoods may be propagated intentionally by malicious actors (“disinformation”) or inadvertently by innocent or misinformed civilians (“misinformation”), and even factual information can be weaponized to cause harm through online harassment and violations of privacy. Many researchers use the term “information disorder” to refer to these rapidly growing issues within online ecosystems.³⁵ The findings from this project’s public perception surveys and analysis of social media discourse point to several patterns that help to understand information disorder in Melanesia during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

Social media is playing an important role in transmitting information about Covid-19, but the quality and trustworthiness of this information is believed to be low. About 26% of Papua New Guineans, 41% of ni-Vanuatu, and 46% of Fijians found information about Covid-19 on Facebook in the week preceding the survey. Use of Facebook, messaging apps, and other social media sites to access Covid-19 information was even higher among younger age groups (under 30 years old). However, citizens trust the Covid-19 information they see on social media much less than they do government or traditional media reports on the pandemic.

While basic facts about the virus are widely known, certain false and harmful narratives about the pandemic remain prominent both offline and online. The survey results suggest that basic facts around Covid-19 and its prevention measures are widely known among the public, and people who recently found Covid-19 information on Facebook are actually less likely to subscribe to the belief that the virus is a “hoax.” But both the survey results and analysis of online discourse point to the existence of several other false and harmful narratives that have been adapted, reconfigured, and quickly spread within the region. Anti-5G conspiracy theories are a prominent example, and may be a factor behind the finding that about one-third of respondents in each of the three countries surveyed believed that avoiding mobile phone towers could protect them from Covid-19. Beliefs in other unscientific prevention measures—

such as consuming traditional foods, taking chloroquine, and avoiding cold foods and temperatures—are also widespread, and in some cases these beliefs see higher support among those who recently found Covid-19 information on social media.

Papua New Guinea’s information ecosystem is affected by public distrust and confusion about Covid-19 messages. Our survey returned several concerning results in Papua New Guinea, including the finding that one in six Papua New Guineans believed that Covid-19 is a “hoax”, even as cases were rising precipitously in the country at the time the survey was conducted. The factor that appears to correlate most strongly with this belief is trust in government and mainstream media institutions: Papua New Guineans who believed that the virus is fake were also much more likely to distrust official information sources. Overall, Papua New Guineans reported higher distrust and dissatisfaction with the information sources on Covid-19 that were available to them, compared to respondents in Fiji and Vanuatu.

Community institutions and leaders, especially religious leaders and healthcare workers, have retained trust even among skeptical cohorts. Religion is a particularly important component of the region’s information ecosystem: it informs beliefs about prevention measures (more than nine in ten believe prayer can protect them from Covid-19 infection); it inspires high levels of trust and satisfaction in religious leadership; and it is a common element of online discourse around the virus. In Papua New Guinea, which had the largest proportion of “Covid-19 deniers” and relatively low trust in major institutions across the board, satisfaction and trust in religious leaders and healthcare workers remained high even among otherwise skeptical cohorts.

Implications for Vaccine Acceptance

Addressing false and harmful Covid-19 information online is a whole-of-society challenge, and the rollout of Covid-19 vaccinations across the region will place great demands on Pacific governments and civil society leaders. As vaccines become more widely available and technical infrastructure advancements bring more people online in 2021 and 2022, the volume of misleading social media posts may increase. Moreover, future health emergencies, natural disasters, outbursts of local conflict or violence, and other crises will produce similar “infodemic” phenomena, where vast quantities of false or low-quality information floods social media and messaging apps and distorts the public discourse. Pacific leaders and international stakeholders

should study the impacts of the Covid-19 infodemic and develop proactive approaches to the threat of anti-vaccine mis- and disinformation in the region.

While surveys and direct feedback from citizens provide a useful look at public sentiment in these countries, a complete analysis of Facebook posts and conversations was beyond the scope of this report. With this in mind, it is our hope that the results of this research will contribute not just to better understanding of Covid-19 issues, but to “infodemic” challenges in the Pacific writ broadly. While more work is needed to develop a truly comprehensive picture of the information ecosystems and government capacity in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, our findings suggest several preliminary implications for Pacific and international stakeholders interested in these issues, especially during the rollout of Covid-19 vaccines:

Citizens possess a basic understanding of risks, but are vulnerable to rumor.

Governments and civil society organizations in the region have been mostly successful in communicating basic information about Covid-19, including simple preventative measures, such as handwashing. But countering beliefs in unscientific treatments and skepticism of 5G and mobile technology will require further work. The prevalence of anti-5G theories online, which are often connected to anti-vaccine rhetoric within online communities, is particularly worrying.

New messaging approaches can help contain information disorder. Refuting online misinformation and conveying nuanced information about Covid-19 vaccines will require governments and health authorities to develop new communication frameworks and methods. While the pandemic has affected Fiji, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea in different ways, each country experienced periods of heightened “information disorder,” where misinformation about a particular topic suddenly began spreading wildly online and government officials struggled to respond. The vaccine rollout will no doubt inspire more incidents of this type, especially as the region’s growing connectivity brings more citizens into online spaces. Developing consistent, effective, and context-appropriate frameworks for handling information disorder will help civil servants and technical communities coordinate with experts, communicate efficiently up the chain of command, and anticipate future misinformation and disinformation risks.

Local religious networks can help disseminate messaging. Religious leaders and healthcare professionals are highly trusted sources for Covid-19 advice across the

region, including among cohorts that are otherwise distrustful of government or harbor anti-establishment views. While public communication around the pandemic has been largely government-led so far, especially in online spaces, religious communities might complement government health communication efforts—including vaccine acceptance campaigns—in meaningful ways.

Information ecosystems shape the flow of misinformation. Relationships between social media use and false beliefs are complex and vary across countries and age cohorts, demanding closer analysis and more carefully tailored solutions. The pattern seen in Vanuatu, where beliefs in some unscientific treatments are more common among young social media users, contrasts with that of Fiji, where the relationship is reversed. Understanding the causal basis for this pattern will take further research, but two important factors may be the level of digital literacy and the breadth of the information environment in each country. Since mobile broadband became widely accessible in Fiji earlier than in Vanuatu, it's possible that more people in Fiji were able to develop digital and media literacy skills that would enable them to identify misinformation. Fiji also experienced a Covid-19 outbreak relatively early in 2020, which received widespread coverage by the local media, while Vanuatu had no cases until November and laws discouraging any reporting on the pandemic without official government clearance. Whatever the root causes, developing future risk communication or vaccine promotion messaging will therefore require close attention to the unique characteristics and demands of these information ecosystems.

Commitment from platforms to engage in the region is critical. The major social media platforms have committed to removing or limiting the spread of Covid-19 misinformation and anti-vaccine misinformation, but they are unprepared to apply these policies to Melanesia's highly localized online discourse. These social media communities are relatively small and close-knit, and users often post or exchange information in local languages such as Bislama, Tok Pisin, and Fijian. The use of local languages creates misunderstandings when public health information is not translated in full, and some online groups have already begun to use their local lingua franca when discussing Covid-19 with the specific intention of evading platforms' moderation algorithms, which are not trained on these languages. Furthermore, the survey results shown here indicate that use of on-platform blocking and reporting tools is extremely low in the region. The end result is that the Pacific's online communities will likely be exposed to online anti-vaccine misinformation that goes mostly unmonitored, especially in the massive Facebook groups where hundreds of thousands of Melanesians participate.

ANNEX I: RESEARCH METHODS

Public perception surveys of 500 adults in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu were carried out by The Asia Foundation and Tebbutt Research using an omnibus method. The samples used for the surveys were nationally representative, based on census statistics and other available data collected by Tebbutt Research. The survey was conducted via phone and enumerators were proficient in multiple local languages in addition to English. The Fiji survey took place in September 2020, the Papua New Guinea survey took place in August 2020, and the Vanuatu survey took place in September 2020.

Social media discourse analysis in Fiji was led by Romitesh Kant with researchers Rufino Varea and Jasmine Kaur. The team utilized a set of keywords related to the pandemic and limited the search to posts in specific Fijian Facebook groups. These keywords related to three different controversial topics that had been trending from February to June 2020: intersections of Covid-19 and religion, the alleged correlations between the virus and 5G technology, and false rumours about an artificial origin of the virus. Data was sourced from two popular Facebook groups in Fiji: Chat (Fiji) and Fijians for Safe and Prosperous Fiji (formerly called Stop 5G Fiji). Chat (Fiji) was chosen due to its popularity, as it has over 250,000 members. Fijians for Safe and Prosperous Fiji was chosen in order to better understand anti-5G narratives in Fiji. The group has approximately 14,000 members. For each relevant post in these groups, the number of public interactions was logged. These included likes, reactions, comments, and shares. The content was categorized according to its source and was then analyzed for distinct themes and concepts and their primary functions.

Discourse analysis of Papua New Guinean social media was carried out by Helen Wagambie, Emmanuel Narokobi, and Leanne Jorari. The team utilised a set of keywords related to the pandemic and limited the search to posts in a handful of large Facebook groups. Data was sourced from posts and comments in several popular Facebook groups and pages in Papua New Guinea, including:

- PNG News — a closed group created in 2012 that grew to more than 275,000 members, but appears to have been recently removed.

- Paitim Garamut — a public group created in 2013 that currently has more than 40,000 members.
- PNG Covid-19 Update — a public group created in 2020 that currently has more than 8,000 members.
- PNG Daily — a page, acting as a news outlet, with more than 80,000 followers.
- East Sepik Development Forum — a closed group with about 1800 members, created in 2016.
- Breaking News Corp — a private group created in 2017 that currently has more than 100,000 members.
- West New Britain Provincial Government — a public group created in 2016 that currently has about 7,500 members (despite the name, it is not an official government page).
- National Control Centre for COVID-19 — the official page created by government information officers to share information about Covid-19, followed by more than 13,000.

Discourse analysis of social media in Vanuatu was carried out by Tess Newton Cain, primarily within the country's primary Facebook discussion group, Yumi Toktok Stret.

ANNEX II: DATA TABLES

How concerned are you about the threat of Covid-19 to your community? (Percent of all adults)

	PNG	FIJI	VANUATU
Very concerned	62.7%	72.9%	71.0%
Somewhat concerned	18.7%	15.3%	16.6%
Not concerned	17.0%	11.2%	10.2%
Never heard of it	1.6%	0.6%	2.1%

Do you think COVID-19 is real, or do you think it is not real (or a hoax)? (Percent of adults who have heard of Covid-19)

	PNG	FIJI	VANUATU
It's real	74.5%	92.7%	92.6%
It's not real, a hoax	16.4%	5.9%	3.6%
Don't know	9.1%	1.4%	3.8%

Which of these actions can protect you from Covid-19 infection? (Percent of adults who have heard of Covid-19)

	PNG	FIJI	VANUATU
Wash hands regularly with soap and water	95.3%	98.9%	98.1%
Shelter in place / quarantine	88.7%	94.4%	93.1%
Wear a face covering	87.1%	93.0%	93.0%
Prayer	93.6%	88.1%	94.4%
Consume traditional foods / drink	80.7%	69.4%	77.7%
Avoid cold foods or cold temperatures	60.5%	66.9%	62.1%
Take chloroquine	47.4%	40.1%	34.2%
Avoid mobile phone towers	37.3%	34.7%	33.4%

In the past week, where have you gotten information about COVID-19?
(Percent of adults who have heard of Covid-19)

	PNG	FIJI	VANUATU
Radio	62.4%	70%	65.8%
Television	40.1%	65.5%	43.8%
Word of mouth	43.5%	35.0%	42.2%
Facebook	26.1%	46.0%	40.6%
Newspaper	55%	41.7%	25.4%
Health professionals	26.4%	7.8%	23.7%
Online news websites	6.5%	19.5%	13.7%
Government / Ministry of Health websites	8.2%	7.7%	9.1%
Messaging apps (Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber)	5.7%	12.9%	8.1%
Other social media (Twitter, TikTok, YouTube)	7.8%	22.6%	8.1%
Phone hotline	3%	2.3%	3.7%
NGO or community group	4%	1.0%	2.4%
Police	6.7%	2.4%	0.8%
Army	2.3%	0.2%	0

How satisfied have you been with each the following as a source of information about the COVID-19 pandemic? How much do you trust the information you receive on the COVID-19 pandemic from each the following? (Percent of adults who have heard of Covid-19)

	PNG		FIJI		VANUATU	
	Very or somewhat satisfied	Trust it very much or somewhat	Very or somewhat satisfied	Trust it very much or somewhat	Very or somewhat satisfied	Trust it very much or somewhat
Radio	80.50%	81.60%	94.70%	95.90%	89.50%	90.80%
Television	71.50%	75.10%	94.00%	95.60%	80.50%	83.20%
People in your community	74.90%	76.90%	82.70%	80.20%	84.00%	86.10%
Social media	55.10%	58.80%	67.80%	65.50%	62.70%	57.60%
Newspapers	79.80%	82.10%	91.00%	93.00%	82.40%	85.30%
Healthcare workers	87.60%	89.40%	95.70%	97.20%	95.30%	97.80%
Government	78.10%	81.40%	92.90%	94.40%	94.30%	95.90%
Religious leaders	86.50%	87.40%	87.50%	87.60%	90.00%	92.90%
Police	75.50%	79.60%	89.90%	91.10%	88.40%	92.70%

How often do you use Facebook? (Percent of all adults)

	PNG	FIJI	VANUATU
Daily or multiple times per day	16.10%	47.80%	28.90%
Every 2-3 days	14.80%	14.20%	18.50%
Weekly	12.50%	18.90%	11.20%
Every 2 to 3 weeks	2.50%	3.70%	2.40%
Monthly	2.30%	0.50%	1.10%
Less often	11.10%	6.30%	5.50%
Never	31.50%	16.50%	30.20%
Don't know	9.30%	2.20%	2.10%

How often do you see information about COVID-19 on Facebook that seems partly or totally untrue? (Percent of adults who use Facebook)

	PNG	FIJI	VANUATU
Frequently	15.00%	22.70%	20.40%
Occasionally	67.10%	67.90%	71.50%
Never	5.10%	7.10%	6.10%
Don't know	12.70%	2.20%	2.00%

If you see information or a message on Facebook or a messaging application that seems partly or totally untrue, what do you do about it? (Percent of adults who use Facebook/messaging apps)

	PNG		FIJI		VANUATU	
	Facebook	Messaging app	Facebook	Messaging app	Facebook	Messaging app
Write a comment correcting it	23.50%	13.60%	7.10%	5.70%	13.00%	9.10%
Respond to the person and correct it	5%	7%	5.60%	7.40%	5.70%	7.10%
Share a link to an official information source	4.50%	5%	2.70%	3.60%	3.40%	3.60%
Report it to Facebook/the social media company	5.70%	2.50%	5.10%	5.10%	2.50%	1.80%

Report it to the police or government	1.60%	0.70%	2.70%	2.70%	0.80%	1.20%
Block the person who posted or shared it	4.90%	4.40%	3.90%	4.90%	1.90%	2.90%
Stop going to that page for information or stop reading the conversation	6.10%	4.20%	8.80%	7.30%	4.50%	3.70%
Do nothing	46.60%	49.20%	80.30%	80.80%	81.40%	83.00%
Don't know	16.70%	19.20%	2.00%	0.70%	2.70%	2.60%
Other	0.30%	3.50%	1.10%	2.20%	1.90%	1.50%

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