

Rising drug purchasing via social media and messaging apps

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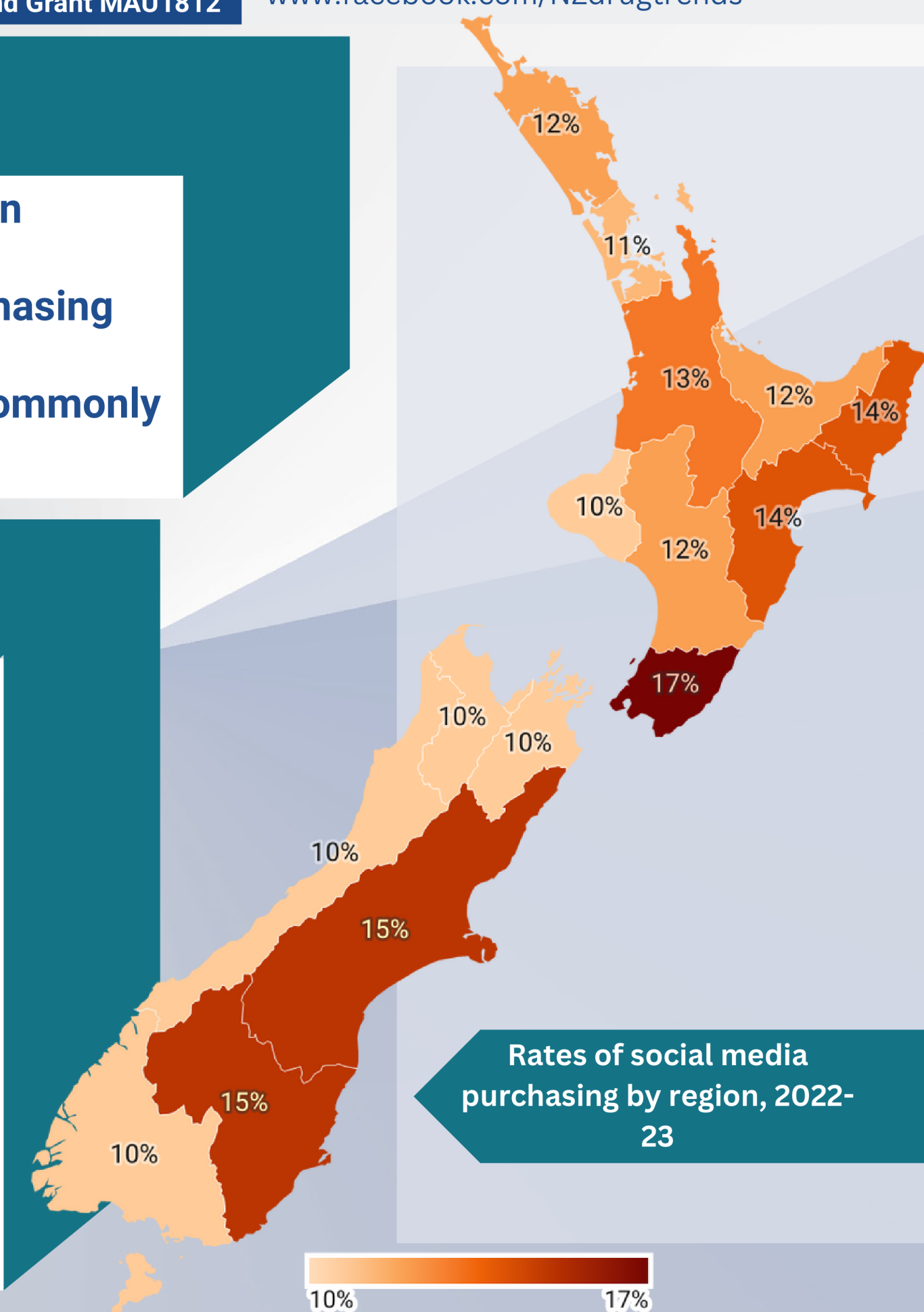
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Key findings

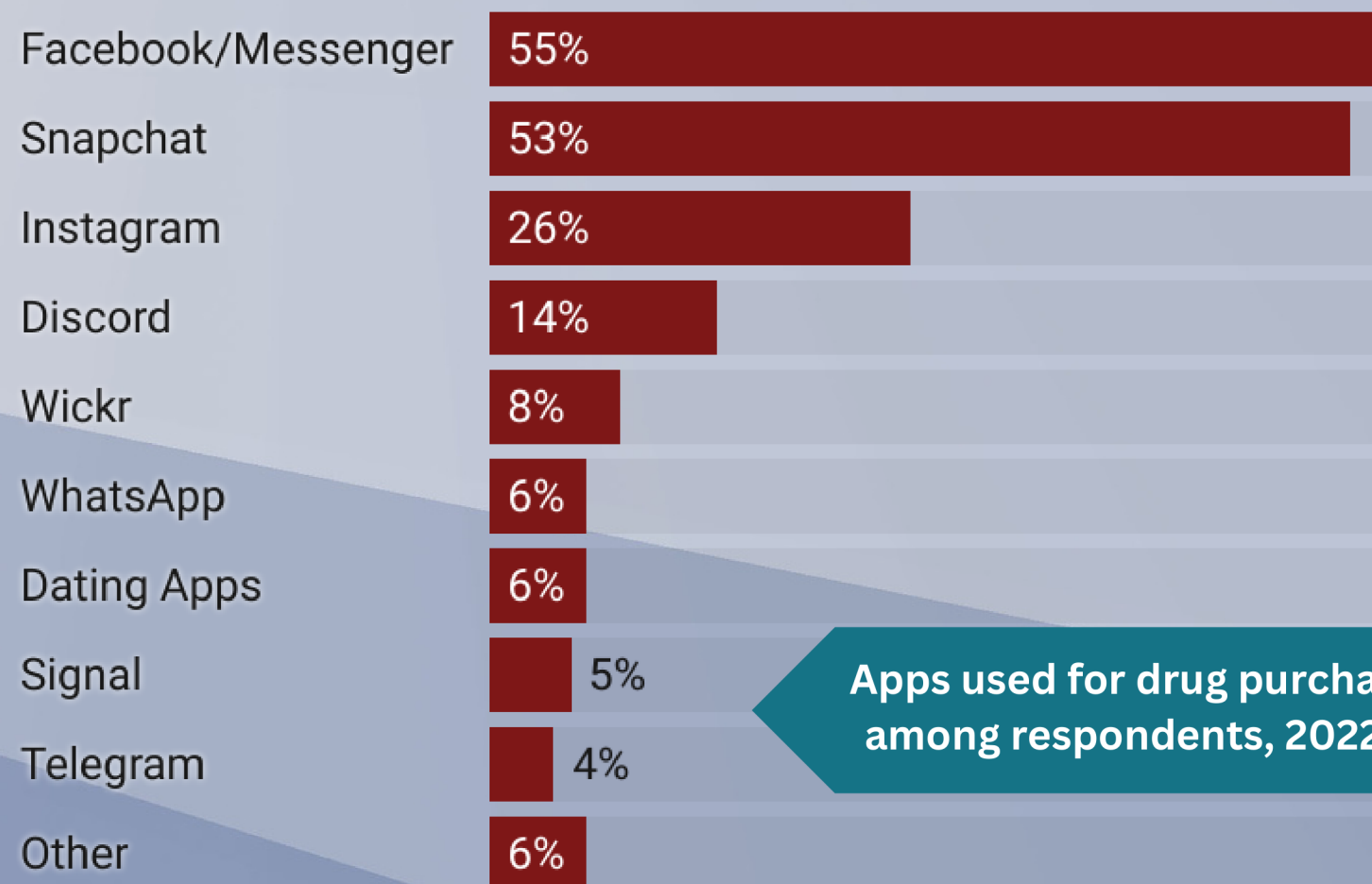
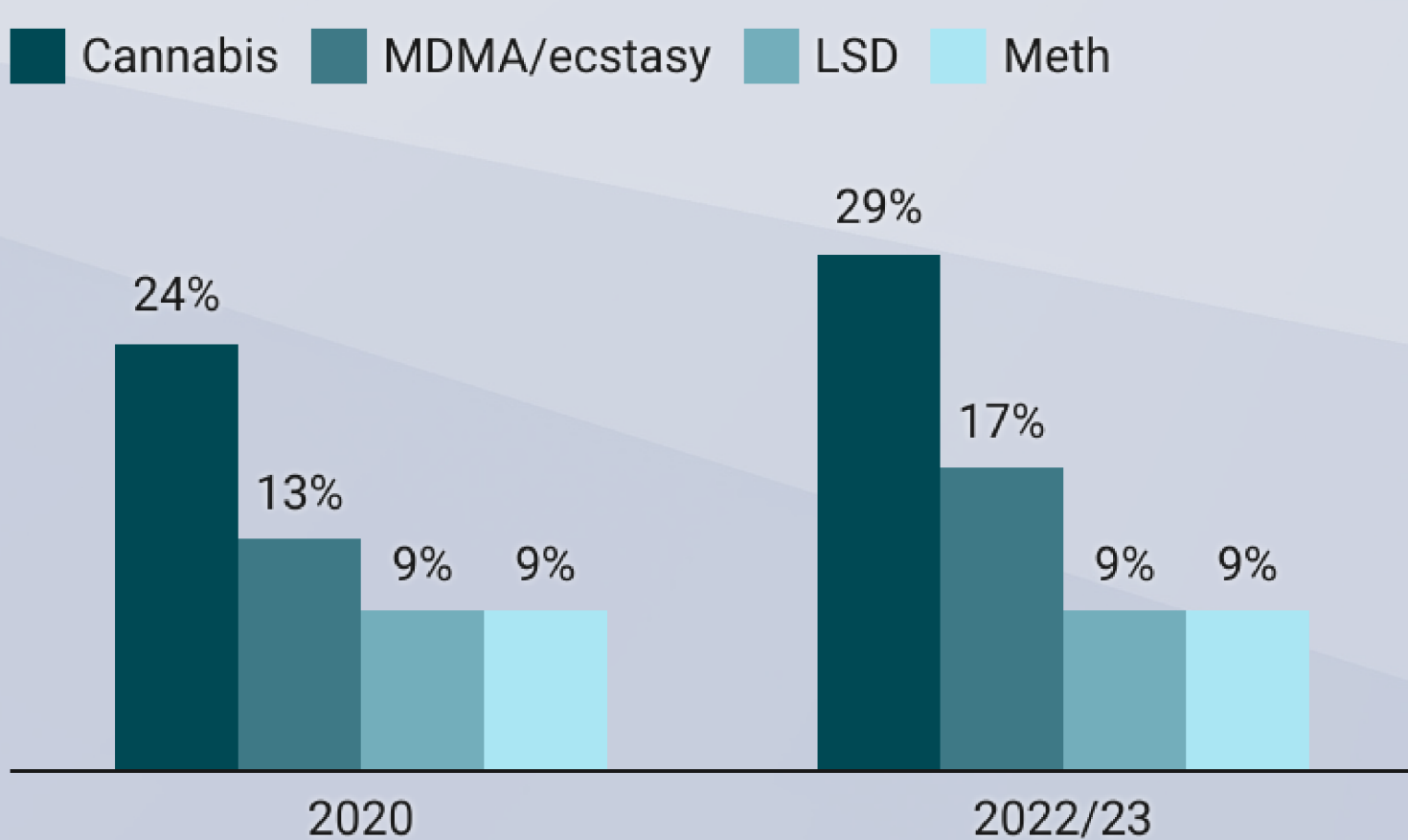
- Rates of social media drug purchasing increased across NZ in 2022/23
- The regions with the highest rates of social media drug purchasing were Wellington, Canterbury and Otago
- Facebook/Messenger, Snapchat and Instagram were most commonly used to buy drugs among respondents

Methods

The New Zealand Drug Trends Survey (NZDTS) is an anonymous online convenience survey designed to provide an annual snapshot of drug market trends in Aotearoa New Zealand. It surveys a very large number of people with recent experience and knowledge of drug use and drug markets across the country (i.e., key experts). The NZDTS is promoted via a targeted Facebook advertising campaign over a period of several months. Completed surveys are audited based on the extent and quality of completion. The 2022/23 survey ran from August 2022 to February 2023 and achieved a final sample of 13,026. While the NZDTS is not intended to be a representative survey, it has a sample that broadly represents the demographic profile and regional population distribution of NZ (see Bulletin 6 for details). However, related to the aims of the survey, the NZDTS sample reports much higher levels of drug use (see Bulletin 7) and is younger than the general population. For more details on methods see, For more details on methods see, van der Sanden et al. (2021). Predictors of using social media to purchase drugs in New Zealand: Findings from a large-scale online survey. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 98, 103430.



Social media purchasing by drug type, 2020-23



Apps used for drug purchasing among respondents, 2022-23

Discussion

Purchasing drugs via social media platforms and messaging apps has emerged in many countries in recent years, including New Zealand. These drug markets take advantage of the streamlined social networking and in-built platform/app features (e.g., self-deleting messages) to organise quick, convenient transactions between buyers and sellers in predominantly local drug markets completed via in person pick up or delivery. Many people use apps to connect with sellers they already know, but selling groups on platforms like Messenger and Discord are also common, and largely involve transactions between strangers. NZDTS findings suggest regional variation in the apps or platforms they currently used for drug transactions. Respondents from Wellington reported using Discord to buy drugs more frequently than those in other regions, while in Otago Snapchat was more popular than anywhere else. The emergence of social media drug markets is concerning as research has indicated they can make drugs more accessible to younger age groups and teens, and may expose people to scams and victimisation as part of completing in-person transactions.