

Logically.

**Examining Misinformation,
Disinformation, and
Malinformation in New
Zealand's Foreign-Language
Information Environment**

Disclaimers

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Executive summary

This report extends Logically's analysis of misinformation, disinformation and malinformation (MDM), and Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour (CIB) in New Zealand's online environment to the most widely spoken non-native or de facto official languages of New Zealand. Publicly available social media posts in Chinese, Samoan, Hindi, French, Tagalog, German, Spanish, Punjabi, Afrikaans, and Tongan were analysed by Logically to identify and assess any MDM and CIB. This analysis involved examining MDM themes in posts in these languages geotagged to New Zealand and cross-referencing it with mentions of New Zealand in global discourse.

Logically found three instances of foreign-language CIB campaigns in Hindi and Chinese that mentioned New Zealand in their rhetoric. Two of these campaigns criticised Five Eyes and AUKUS and suggested New Zealand's actual or prospective participation was indicative of hostile attitudes towards either India or China. The third campaign sought to amplify anti-Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sentiment in Chinese and English languages through the use of botnets to boost ideologically aligned posts and articles on Facebook and X. Crucially, none of these campaigns appeared to gain significant traction within New Zealand itself in the respective languages, but in total appear to indicate external attempts to influence public opinion and attitudes, including in New Zealand, toward pro- or anti-Five Eyes and CCP perspectives.

Logically also identified that for three languages - French, German, and Spanish - the most prevalent MDM discourse about New Zealand centred on COVID-19 disinformation and semi-related conspiracy narratives. Discussion about New Zealand in this context and in these languages generated high volumes of content outside the country reproducing disinformation and malinformation claims. However, this did not translate into high engagement or respective volumes of content tagged to New Zealand. We assess that due to the prevalence of conspiracy narratives in English in New Zealand, uptake and engagement in these narratives may be bilingual and result from the same users engaging in narratives in both languages.

Finally, this report highlights the robust parallel internet culture and infrastructure that facilitates Chinese-language discussion. Unlike other language demographics, this group relied on China government-backed news and social media platforms rather than fully participating in non-Chinese platforms like Facebook and X. This digital behaviour presents challenges and opportunities for understanding and engaging with these communities and highlights the need for tailored approaches in research, digital communication, and outreach strategies.

New Zealand Foreign-Language Breakdown

The languages included in the report were selected based on their prominence as the top foreign languages spoken in New Zealand, as identified by 2018 census data published by the New Zealand Ministry for Ethnic Communities.¹ Specifically, the languages included Chinese (199,511 speakers - Grouping Northern Chinese, Yue, and Sinitic²), Samoan (101,937 speakers), Hindi (69,471 speakers), French (55,116 speakers), Tagalog (43,278 speakers), German (41,385 speakers), Spanish (38,823 speakers), Afrikaans (36,966 speakers), Tongan (35,820 speakers), and Punjabi (34,227 speakers).

Due to their official status and widespread use, the report excludes New Zealand's official and de facto official languages: te reo Māori, New Zealand Sign Language, and English.

Methodology

Logically collected and analysed data from 20 March 2023 to 20 March 2024. Publicly accessible data was collected using a suite of tools, proprietary software, and Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) collection techniques. Our approach involved using Boolean queries based on identified keywords to gather data from various languages. Logically specifically focused on political, economic, security, and societal themes due to the higher impact on New Zealand's societal stability and national security should a FIMI campaign or disinformation take root. Understanding how these themes may be targeted or leveraged is crucial for assessing how MDM or FIMI campaigns could affect public perception, social cohesion, and national security.

Our team of subject matter experts selected keywords in English, which were then translated accurately across different languages using a combination of tools and analyst expertise. Additionally, we conducted an analysis of cross-border narrative uptake to achieve the following objectives:

- Ascertain the direction of foreign-language narrative flow in the New Zealand information environment.
- Identify any influence operations or malicious actors targeting specific communities with MDM campaigns.

The keywords and Boolean query written were identical across all languages analysed for this report. Translation was carried out 1:1 where possible and adapted for key phrase terminology when different scripts required adaptation (such as with Chinese languages and Punjabi).

¹ "Top 25 Languages in New Zealand." Ministry for Ethnic Communities, Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 19 June 2023, <https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/resources/our-languages-o-tatou-reo/languages-in-nz/>. Accessed 8 April 2024.

² For this report, the various Chinese languages and dialects detailed in the 2018 New Zealand census data are grouped together. This is because most natural language processing models simplify Chinese dialects and language into Chinese and Chinese Traditional when written.

Keywords and terminology were drawn from analysis and research queries set up for Logically's English-language deep dive into New Zealand's MDM landscape; [Misinformation, Disinformation, and Malinformation Threats Impacting New Zealand Audiences](#).

Platform Coverage

Logically gathered information from various open and publicly available sources across the internet. The New Zealand foreign-language online information environment consists of four main areas: social media platforms (e.g., X, Facebook, and Instagram), online forums (e.g., skykiwi.com), and online news outlets. 95% of the population had routine internet access, with 81% accessing social media platforms³.

Information provided by Meta, ByteDance, X, Snap Inc., and Google indicated that the total registered users per platform in New Zealand as of early 2023 were Facebook—2.95 million, YouTube—4.24 million, Instagram—2.15 million users, TikTok—1.65 million users, Snapchat—1.45 million users, and X—791,000.

Publicly available sources across the internet used in this report included:

- X
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Reddit
- Telegram
- YouTube
- Tumblr
- Weblog (Blog) platforms
- Forums and message boards
- News websites

To enhance language specificity, Logically surveyed news and community websites in the languages selected for analysis in New Zealand (as well as prominent news and community websites external to New Zealand) that targeted the relevant diasporas. This allowed us to hone our analysis further to content specific to these languages.

Data Collection and Analysis

The process for gathering and analysing this publicly available information involved:

- **Data Collection:** To ensure comprehensive coverage, relevant keywords were identified through thorough research and analysis of the overarching MDM themes of political, economic, security, and societal impacts. Boolean logic and custom queries were then applied to search for content containing these keywords across various languages. The initial selection of keywords and queries was an iterative process, refined based on the MDM

³ S. Kemp, "*Digital 2023: New Zealand*," DataReportal, 2023.

identified in each language. Keywords were selected in English and then translated into the target languages using a combination of automated translation tools and human expertise. This iterative approach ensured accuracy and captured sociolinguistic nuances across different languages. Once the translated keywords were applied, the data collection process involved searching for multi-modal content associated with the identified keywords, including images, videos, and audio. Analysts then reviewed the collected data iteratively, further refining and narrowing down the Boolean queries as needed to ensure comprehensive and consistent coverage across languages. Throughout this iterative process, analysts collaborated closely to validate and adjust the keywords and Boolean queries, taking into account linguistic and cultural variations. Continuous monitoring and refinement were conducted to enhance the accuracy and relevance of the collected data, ensuring a robust and thorough analysis of the foreign-language digital landscape within New Zealand.

- **Geofencing:** Geofencing refers to the process of setting geographical boundaries for data collection and analysis. In this analysis, analysts created virtual boundaries around specific geographic areas, such as within New Zealand and areas outside the country that could potentially influence New Zealand's information space. This was achieved using advanced geotagging techniques and specialized software tools designed for geofencing purposes. This allowed us to compare and contrast online discourse and information dissemination within these defined boundaries. By leveraging advanced geofencing tools, we accurately captured and analysed data from targeted geographical regions, ensuring the relevance and reliability of our findings. Moreover, our team of analysts employed iterative processes and rigorous data validation techniques to ensure the accuracy and validity of our geofenced data. By analysing these aspects, our aim was to gain a nuanced understanding of how misinformation and disinformation flow within New Zealand and how global information exchange impacts this flow. Geographical context was taken into account by geotagging the metadata attached to posts and profiles, as discussed further in the limitations section. Findings from geofenced data are referenced where relevant throughout the report.
- **Role of Analysts:** Subject matter expert analysts played a crucial role in this analysis. Their expertise went beyond the capabilities of keyword searches and AI tools. Analysts applied an iterative approach that was consistent across each of the languages to validate and invalidate MDM and CIB activities, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate analysis. Their expertise enabled the identification of subtle patterns and trends that automated tools alone could not detect, providing a richer, more contextualised understanding of the data.
- **Data Analysis:** The analysis included pattern and trend analyses related to online behaviour and MDM activities. Logically applied its methodologies for identifying patterns, trends, and narratives and conducting Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour (CIB) analysis (see below for more detail), which includes Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) for malicious online behaviour. This methodology aligns with the relevant frameworks and guidelines, specifically

Logically's OSINT tradecraft.⁴ The process also integrates digital anthropological insights and subject-matter expertise to enhance the assessment, ensuring that the analysis is grounded in a deep understanding of the socio-political context.

- **Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour Analysis:** We utilise AI models for automated detection to recognize and understand the coordination tactics used in disseminating MDM. Common tactics identified by AI models include coordinated reposting, where a network of accounts rapidly shares the same post or message to increase its visibility, and hashtag hijacking, which involves injecting disinformation into a mainstream conversation about a trending topic. This tactic entails a set of accounts sharing posts containing MDM with a given hashtag within a short timeframe. We take a human-in-the-loop approach and once clusters have been identified, analysts investigate these clusters and validate any potential CIB findings.

Definitions

- **Misinformation:** False information that is spread, regardless of intent to deceive.
- **Disinformation:** False information that is spread with the intent to deceive.
- **Malinformation:** Information that may be decontextualised, obscured, or used to mislead or cause harm.
- **Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB):** The organised use of fake accounts and networks to manipulate public discourse.
- **Geofencing:** Restricting access to content based on the user's geographic location.
- **Social media platforms:** Online platforms and websites allow users to interact and share content.
- **Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI):** Messaging designed to "influence, disrupt or subvert New Zealand's national interests by deceptive, corruptive or coercive means."⁵

Limitations

The nature of OSINT methodologies and reliance on open-source data collection involves limitations with regards to aspects of the collection and analysis found within this report, as detailed below:

- **Geofencing:** Geofencing was used in this report's analysis to target content explicitly related to New Zealand. Geofencing involves filtering content to include only posts from

⁴ "Guidelines for Public Interest OSINT Investigations," ObsINT, January, 2024.

⁵ "Countering Espionage and Foreign Interference." New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, <https://www.nzsis.govt.nz/our-work/countering-espionage-and-foreign-interference/>. Accessed 17 April 2024.

users tagged as being located in New Zealand. This method helps identify content specifically targeting New Zealand audiences. However, it's important to note that geofencing has limitations. It does not capture users based in New Zealand but have listed their location elsewhere for satirical or anonymization reasons. It does not include content from accounts that do not list their location. Additionally, since approximately 70% of online content lacks geotags, narrowing the search to New Zealand geotagged content reduces the available sample size for analysis.

- **Translation:** Logically employed a range of third-party translation tools, each selected for its specific strengths and capabilities. These resources included advanced machine translation services, multilingual dictionaries, and language experts proficient in the target languages. By leveraging this diverse set of translation resources, we aimed to ensure a comprehensive and accurate translation process. This approach allowed us to effectively capture sociolinguistic nuances, cross-validate the content's accuracy, identify any discrepancies, and attain an enhanced contextual understanding of the translated material.
- **Limited access to some language-specific social media platforms:** Limited access to Chinese-language social media platforms such as WeChat hindered the data collection. Therefore, better coverage is needed to understand their impact.
- **Low language volume and language terminology:** The data from the New Zealand 2018 Census used to inform language selection for this report highlights the small proportion of the population in New Zealand who speak languages other than English or *te reo Māori*. Only three percent of the population speaks some form of Chinese language or dialect, and two percent of the population speaks Hindi. In comparison, all other languages examined in this report are spoken by one percent or less of New Zealand's population. Moreover, census data does not differentiate between mono and polyglot ability or between spoken and written proficiency. Therefore, it is likely that more online communication is in English, even within communities that speak the languages analysed in this report.

By leveraging the combined power of advanced open-source data collection tools and the nuanced understanding of subject matter expert analysts, Logically provided a comprehensive and detailed analysis that goes beyond the capabilities of keyword searches and AI tools alone. This approach ensured a deeper and more accurate understanding of MDM and CIB activities, capturing the broader context and subtleties necessary for effective analysis.

Analysing New Zealand's Foreign-Language Information Environment

The analysis is broken down into sections that build on each other.

1. This language-by-language breakdown provides an overview of prevalent MDM narratives for each language analysed and an assessment of MDM vulnerabilities.

2. A section detailing potential CIB networks identified during Logically's study.
3. A language breakdown analysis inside and outside New Zealand to examine MDM narrative uptake from outside New Zealand to within the country.
4. A section analysing popular websites per language and their significance for New Zealand in regards to the spread of MDM.

Breakdown by language

Chinese

(199,511 speakers - Grouping Northern Chinese, Yue, and Sinitic)

Though only 3.27% of all New Zealand residents speak some form of Chinese language or dialect, this figure is the highest of all languages analysed in this report. Key to the analysis of Chinese-language discourse is understanding China's highly advanced digital infrastructure and the subsequent development of a thriving Chinese internet culture and digital ecosystem whose scale and cultural importance parallels that of Western internet culture among the targeted audiences. In addition to mainstream social media and the broader open internet, Logically analysed Bilibili, Baidu Tieba, QZone, Sina Weibo, SkyKiwi, and Xiaohongshu mentions. Most Chinese-speaking audiences in New Zealand rely on these outlets for information on local events and international Chinese community perspectives and politics.⁶ These websites have increased importance among the Chinese-speaking community due to the perception among Chinese New Zealanders that New Zealand media is predominantly based around "linear TV" and not "for me" - that is, offline and excludes Chinese audiences. The preference of Chinese New Zealanders for China-origin content and China government-backed media paired with the aversion to domestic non-Chinese New Zealand media almost certainly makes these groups especially vulnerable to China-government misinformation, disinformation, and propagandistic efforts.⁷

The CCP's efforts and tactics to shape how their government and China are perceived on the global stage are well documented, especially through the use of China-origin content and media. This includes aims to position state media as equivalents to trusted and independent services while retaining control of its messaging - being "central to [their] efforts to influence other countries, control information about and protect the party, and gain what China leaders and officials have called 'discourse power' to amplify China's narratives about its policies, its party, its leader and its role in the world"⁸. In addition, concerted efforts by the CCP to covertly expose foreign audiences to "programming from the China state" through media partnerships with foreign media distributors and influencers have been catalogued around the world.⁹ These efforts are bolstered on social media through the deployment of botnets and other forms of CIB to inflate message exposure.

⁶ Hoyle, Caleb, "On the Record," Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand Contemporary China Research Centre, April 2024.

⁷ Irvine, H and Morgan, W, "Asian Media Use in Aotearoa NZ in 2021," NZ On Air, October 2021.

⁸ Kurlantzick, Joshua, "China Wants Your Attention, Please," Council on Foreign Relations, December 2022.

⁹ Bandurski, David, "Co-Producing with the CCP," The China Media Project, February 2023.

Therefore, China's approach to shaping its global image moves beyond simple foreign relations and into tight control, misleading audiences via obfuscating message origin and platform manipulation.

Sentiments regarding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) were significant within the analysed sample and notably appeared in around 8% of global mentions relating to New Zealand. The dialogue associated with BRI tended to include conversations regarding infrastructure projects and geopolitical influence, especially concerning New Zealand-China relations. Content here was heavily pro-China, indicating the prevalent narratives strongly align with the China Communist Party government's "China Story" regarding a centralised strategic portrayal of the country. Further analysis enabled Logically to identify high-influence accounts on X that correspondingly appeared to "counter... the Western anti-China narrative" paired with a specific New Zealand focus. These accounts posted in Chinese and English achieved a high international reach and are explicitly linked to Chinese state infrastructure. The culmination of these factors strongly indicates a centralised China government effort to influence the Chinese-speaking New Zealand population to spread pro-CCP narratives. Though these narratives may not be considered disinformation, the tactics utilised to ensure exposure to them - and thus non-organically shape discourse and opinion - constitutes FIMI. The linkages with BRI, which has been approached cautiously by successive New Zealand governments, indicate Beijing may perceive the BRI rationale as a strong selling point to expand political influence among the Chinese-speaking population of New Zealand.

In a similar vein to BRI, discussions on AUKUS - a nuclear submarine construction collaboration plan between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States focused on building military capabilities to counter China in the Indo-Pacific - were mentioned in around 10% of posts across Chinese news outlets within the sample of global mentions relating to New Zealand analysed by Logically. The anti-China focus of AUKUS is commonly addressed by narratives circulated globally by the CCP through both overtly state-backed and covert means. These narratives generally portray AUKUS as aggressive and destabilising, suggesting that it is more likely to instigate conflict than prevent it, an alarmist stance that is circulated with the aim to saturate discourse and overwhelm opposing opinion through China's media manipulation strategies, effectively influencing public opinion on AUKUS. Logically assesses that this activity is part of a centralised effort by China's government to shape New Zealand's perception of the AUKUS agreement, aiming to limit the expansion and impact of the agreement and its anti-China focus. This effort is especially directed towards Chinese-language discourse in New Zealand, given its role in the Five-Eyes intelligence-sharing regime with the countries of AUKUS.

In Japan, China's government misinformation has explicitly targeted the environmental aspects of nuclear components of AUKUS - Japan's current government has stated its intent to participate in the development of nuclear submarines within the scope of AUKUS building off its historic submarine collaboration with Australia. Given the strength of environmental issues within New Zealand, Logically assesses it is almost certain that China's government-centralised disinformation will soon expand to focus on the nuclear aspects of AUKUS among the Chinese New Zealand population as a means to influence other New Zealand demographics.

Notably, AUKUS is used somewhat equally by anti-China government/CCP organisations within New Zealand. The use of AUKUS to promote anti-CCP sentiment within the Chinese diaspora community in New Zealand almost certainly results from the perceived anti-China government purpose of AUKUS. The network using AUKUS for these purposes maintains a community within New Zealand and has organised offline protests against the CCP. Further activity of this network is detailed in this report's Patterns of Activity section.

Logically also identified several account networks that exhibited patterns of activity commonly associated with botnets and coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB) among Chinese-language social media activity. The presence of CIB in pro-CCP narratives is consistent with centralised global FIMI activity on behalf of the China government. These activities are detailed in the **Patterns of Activity** section of this report.

Samoan

(101,937 speakers)

Samoan-language discursive themes within New Zealand's digital sphere appear to be organic and collated around the comments sections of Samoan-specific news and social media pages.

The Samoan-language media landscape, including outlets like Savali News and Samoa Capital Radio, plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, promoting linguistic diversity, and fostering community resilience. While these platforms primarily focus on local news and community events, they also serve as channels for disseminating information on broader geopolitical developments, such as AUKUS. However, unlike Chinese language activities, Samoan-language engagement lacked any indications of centralised MDM management.

Though such comment sections are often targeted by malicious actors as a site to spread disinformation and malinformation, no Samoan-language MDM was identified when the discourse was analysed. Further, there was no evidence of any external attempts to conduct any elements of information manipulation or influence.

Hindi

(69,471 speakers)

Throughout our analysis of discourse in Hindi in New Zealand's digital information space, Logically noted a high cross-border transmission of politically charged narratives that exhibited characteristics of misinformation and disinformation. These narratives included misleading information about political events and false claims intended to sway public opinion, particularly between Hindi-language conversations outside New Zealand and those geofenced to New Zealand. This aspect of discourse is detailed further in the **Language Breakdown** Analysis section of the report.

Hindi language engagement with AUKUS as a theme is generally related to New Zealand's membership in the Five Eyes intelligence sharing regime with Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, but lacked the indications of a centralised CIB or FIMI campaign.

Engagements in these narratives appeared to result from Hindi language engagement within Indian social media and news sources that promoted information in line with domestic Indian perspectives on these issues. While some Hindi-language narratives align with current government pronouncements and ideologies, this situation appears to result from something other than a concerted influence campaign by New Delhi. Therefore, Hindi language narratives on AUKUS and Five Eyes are highly dissimilar to those narratives on the same issues, which are almost certainly coordinated by Beijing.

New Zealand Hindi-language engagement in domestic Indian politics revealed patterns indicative of both disinformation and malinformation. Individual users often aligned their engagement with political narratives from India that resonated with their ideological perspectives. Logically identified digital infrastructure and assets, including inauthentic networks and politically aligned influencers, that were reposted in New Zealand's Hindi-language digital environment. These activities originated outside of New Zealand and, notably, did not address local issues within New Zealand.

For example, some politically charged narratives supporting the current Indian government or criticising opposition movements without factual basis exemplified disinformation. These narratives were disseminated through CIB, blending factual content with manipulated information to achieve ideological objectives. This type of activity misleads audiences and distorts public understanding of political realities, highlighting the harmful impact of MDM on the information environment. As part of its analysis, Logically identified multiple account networks associated with this discourse that exhibited patterns of activity commonly associated with botnets and CIB. These are detailed in the **Patterns of Activity** section of this report.

French

(55,116 speakers)

Global French-language MDM narratives discussing New Zealand's approach to COVID focus primarily on vaccine hesitancy, COVID misinformation campaigns, and public trust in healthcare institutions. Discussions across these themes, mentioned in approximately 30% of global posts mentioning "New Zealand" in French, leveraged and misrepresented New Zealand's strategy of combatting the spread of COVID to bolster a wider conspiratorial and anti-vax theme popular across other European languages analysed. The conglomeration of anti-vax narratives is consistent with other Western MDM narratives found throughout online communities to include a common association with conspiratorial beliefs. These theories are not centralised in that there is no coordinated effort to develop and propagate MDM narratives related to COVID or vaccines; however, such information propagates more naturally among groups that tend to engage in conspiratorial information sources. These populations remain vulnerable to those seeking to profit from their conspiracy-aligned perspectives who constantly recycle and adapt anti-vax and COVID narratives to sustain widespread engagement and drive up the value of creators who market this MDM.

While anti-vax and COVID conspiracy narratives circulate widely in French-language discourse on platforms such as X and Facebook, they did not demonstrate significant resonance when

geofenced to New Zealand's French-speaking population, as the same percentage of anti-vax and COVID-themed MDM content was not found in French-language content geotagged to New Zealand. This situation likely resulted from the prevalence of anti-vax and anti-COVID content produced in English with far less French-language engagement. However, given the strength of these narratives, they sustain the ability to influence the French-speaking population in terms of vaccination policies and public health decisions, reflecting the broader global discourse. Therefore, Logically considers it likely that given a public health issue, there would be a corresponding increase in these anti-vax narratives in a concerted attempt to influence New Zealand's domestic policy decisions.

German

(41,385 Speakers)

Analysis of German-language MDM discourse revealed that engagement mirrored similar engagement with anti-vax and anti-COVID narratives noted for other European language groups within New Zealand. However, the prominence of one anti-COVID narrative increased among German speakers globally due to an article by a German independent 'journalist' that claimed, "the government knew about every adverse reaction before a single vaccination was administered in New Zealand."

The German creator behind this claim appears to have engaged with the German community in New Zealand to promote the author's Telegram channel. Even though the user used Telegram, analysis of his activity showed no clear indications of involvement with or manipulation by the Russian government. Moreover, while this article reached over a million individuals globally and actively targeted Germans in New Zealand, minimal content engagement was geotagged within New Zealand. This lack of engagement indicates German speakers in New Zealand were aware of the content; they were not receptive to its claims and did not advance it further in their online engagement.

Spanish

(38,823 Speakers)

Spanish-language MDM discourse and engagement echoed the findings of French and German speakers being most engaged in anti-vax and anti-COVID policy measures by New Zealand. However, online posts in Spanish were noted as having a higher level of engagement with MDM anti-vax conspiracy theories, as one-quarter (25%) of all engagements across both geofenced and non-geofenced data included anti-vax or COVID-conspiracy themes. Online engagement by Spanish speakers in these themes and conspiracy narratives tended to increase dramatically following events that energised the New Zealand anti-vax community across all language groups. This engagement is illustrative of a connective information environment between Spanish language discourse in New Zealand and the greater global Spanish language community with regard to anti-vax and COVID-conspiracy discourse. This connectivity indicates MDM activities that engage

with the Spanish-speaking diaspora have the potential to reverberate outside of the target area and thus make the community in New Zealand vulnerable to this sort of externally directed Spanish language MDM.

Illustrative of this, the most popular geofenced post came from a Spanish doctor claiming that the former New Zealand government “forced” citizens to get vaccinated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Posts that engaged with these narratives often shared links to news stories discussing New Zealand by media outlets known to promote and disseminate anti-vax conspiracy theories. Spanish-language anti-vax discourse spiked in December 2023 following the arrest of a New Zealand healthcare worker who gained fame from speaking out against vaccines and branding himself as a “whistleblower.” This story gained popularity among the Spanish-language New Zealand population and the global Spanish-language diaspora.

However, New Zealand was also leveraged and discussed in ways to further Spanish-domestic MDM. Logically identified a post from a Spanish conspiracy influencer and political provocateur misrepresenting the New Zealand government’s gender equity legislation. The government’s decision was characterised by a Spanish-language influencer as aimed at “end[ing] LGBTQ indoctrination in schools” - intending to position the legislation in wider disinformation about LGBTQ+ individuals, specifically that LGBTQ+ is a choice or lifestyle forced on children at school. Unlike anti-vax and COVID-conspiracy content, this activity did not gain significant traction among New Zealand’s Spanish-speaking population online.

Punjabi

(34,227 Speakers)

Punjabi-language narratives vulnerable to MDM and FIMI focus on the geopolitical positioning of New Zealand relative to India. A prominent topic was AUKUS, with discourse reflecting a general negative sentiment toward AUKUS. For this topic, narratives echo the information flow and direction of travel for themes vulnerable to malinformation found in Hindi-language discussion, particularly the framing of AUKUS as an “anti-Indian” project and associated claims. Such content flowed from engagement with the information environment emerging from India, with mechanisms for CIB, strategic decontextualisation and misrepresentations of facts (malinformation), and dissemination spilling over into Punjabi New Zealand discourse.

MDM and CIB risks to the Punjabi-speaking community in New Zealand are most likely to come from existing political and religious tensions in India and the spillover to the diaspora. This is consistent with the risk dynamics noted in Hindi-speaking communities in New Zealand.

Afrikaans, Tagalog and Tongan

Logically found limited discourse about New Zealand in Tongan, Tagalog or Afrikaans. Logically’s observation aligns with census data, indicating that Tagalog speakers comprise 0.84% of New Zealand’s population, Afrikaans speakers approximately 0.79%, and Tongan speakers constitute around 0.76%. The scarcity of speakers in these languages almost certainly results in limited available content. It is also likely that those speakers in New Zealand engage in native language

content externally in New Zealand, where such content is more prevalent. Complicating our assessment of these groups is the high prevalence of English speakers among them, which indicates that, due to the lack of native language content, their engagement in New Zealand is primarily in English. Because of this, there was not enough content in either of these languages to assess for MDM.

Patterns of Activity

This section details patterns observed across the dataset, detailing those consistent with activity associated with Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour (CIB) campaigns, botnets, or malicious techniques designed to manipulate online discourse. By closely examining these patterns, we aim to gain valuable insights into the nature and extent of coordinated activities, shedding light on how MDM themes and narratives may target various linguistic communities.

Hindi

A small-scale Hindi-language CIB campaign on Facebook made statements in support of the outcome of the recent New Zealand General Election and compared the former New Zealand government to the current Canadian government. These posts were shared on the same day and used identical wording alongside identical images. This network of accounts did not carry New Zealand geotag metadata.

The sentiment and wording expressed in the Facebook campaign also saw spillover to X, allowing for the analysis of common accounts pointing to a network that strongly supports the current Indian government. In some instances, spillover of this ideological stance involved New Zealand, predominantly in the context of Khalistani separatists and New Zealand's stance concerning Canada. Narratives circulating in this network claimed that the Khalistani separatist movement is an invention of Five Eyes countries and that New Zealand is particularly friendly to the movement. This narrative found some traction within New Zealand and was circulated by several accounts.

Chinese

Logically's investigation discovered several Chinese-language social media accounts and posts that displayed traits commonly associated with coordinated or inauthentic behaviour. Our analysis identified two potential networks promoting narratives that either promoted or criticised China's government and its interests in New Zealand politics. These networks were not geofenced to New Zealand but aimed at Chinese diaspora audiences globally.

In the first potential network, we identified several accounts on X sharing posts directly quoting an article published by China state-controlled media. The article reports on comments made by the United States government, which raised the possibility of New Zealand joining AUKUS. The accounts that shared these posts highlighted that such a move would anger China. Logically determined that these posts exhibited traits of inauthentic activity, such as generic username handles and high-volume patterns of content sharing. The content on these accounts' pages consisted of retweets of Chinese news articles and posts promoting Chinese culture. This suggests

that these accounts are being used for engagement farming and promoting China-government messaging.

The second network Logically identified consisted of a c.150-account strong network on X spread across nine countries, with 20% of the network tagged as originating in Australia. Accounts in this network post and subsequently boost posts critical of China from a hawkish, fringe-right stance. They have heavily circulated pro-AUKUS content (1,750 posts) in English and Chinese, holding a position that a conflict will dismantle the CCP and the current China state.

These accounts openly state that they operate as a group clustered around the Australia-based 'hub' of the New Federal State of China (NFSC), a staunchly anti-CCP movement associated with several high-profile Chinese dissident personalities. The NFSC's ideological stance often aligns with Western fringe-right views (particularly those in America) and has led them to adopt COVID conspiracy rhetoric. The NFSC is known to operate bot networks and run CIB campaigns to boost discourse and rhetoric that suits its agenda.

This network shared 144 times an article critical of New Zealand's COVID response published on a British COVID conspiracy website. The article's header married de-contextualised statistics with outright disinformation statements such as "the depopulation agenda" and "a plot to kill your family" (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Snapshot of Chinese-language Covid Disinformation on X¹⁰.

This network has also promoted and circulated content to various media outlets and social media profiles affiliated with the NFSC to create a multi-platform campaign. While no content carries New Zealand geotags, Logically cannot confirm that this content has yet reached English-speaking or Chinese audiences in New Zealand.

The coordinated activities in multiple languages have the potential to amplify specific narratives, influence perceptions, and shape discussions on key issues. These networks of varying sizes and agendas demonstrate how non-native or diasporic languages within a country can also be targeted

¹⁰ Translation: "Recent reports from governments in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the UK and Europe confirm that the number of excess deaths since the mass rollout of Covid vaccines has exceeded 2 million, supporting a 2020 forecast by the US military intelligence agency Deagel: UK by 2025 and the U.S. population will decline by 77.1% and 68.5% respectively."

by influence operations. These operations may not aim to impact the country itself but rather influence the perceptions of other countries within the target community.

Language Breakdown Analysis: Inside and Outside New Zealand

To analyse foreign-language MDM narratives in New Zealand, Logically collected content in two phases: all content within relevant languages that carried a geotag to New Zealand and all content in relevant languages globally that mentioned New Zealand. With this dataset, Logically can effectively assess where MDM narratives about New Zealand have impacted foreign-language communities inside the country.

Broadly, Logically found that foreign-language MDM narratives and CIB operations about New Zealand did not gain significant traction within the country for the respective languages. This is true of the Chinese-language influence operations to promote the “China story” through social media posts and the uptake of anti-CCP narratives identified as part of the NFSC Australian botnet. Both of these operations, while discussing New Zealand directly, did not influence Chinese-language discourse geotagged to the country on the topics at hand. It remains possible a concerted effort by the China government to shape the perceptions of the Chinese-speaking community in New Zealand could influence this population politically to advance China government efforts - such as anti-AUKUS and anti-FVEY country positions.

Similarly, French, Spanish, and German COVID-19 disinformation and conspiracy narratives, while attaining moderate reach outside New Zealand, could have impacted discourse in those languages inside New Zealand. However, this may be due to the proliferation of English-language COVID-19 disinformation in New Zealand, as found in Logically’s deep dive report and assessment of MDM in New Zealand. Since the content of these narratives is the same regardless of language, analysing English-language circulation tagged to New Zealand will likely provide a better understanding of the impact of the specific claims identified in these foreign languages. Specifically, these conspiracy theories propagate most effectively in English due to quantity, and most of the population with conspiratorial or anti-vax leanings are likely to engage in English primarily.

An exception to this can be found in the Hindi and Punjabi-language discourse. The heightened political and religious tensions in India directly inform discussion in New Zealand. A mix of divisive political opinion, CIB activity external to New Zealand being engaged with in-country, and disinformation about New Zealand’s stance on political situations in India exist in Hindi and Punjabi-language discourse tagged to the country. It must be noted, however, that although present in New Zealand’s digital information environment, numbers for engagement are low. This situation may be attributed to the limitation around sample size and language terminology outlined in the methodology’s limitations section.

Logically identified that the vast majority of cross-border narratives achieving significant engagement across all analysed languages were organic discussions about New Zealand’s domestic issues, its international position, and issues related to migration and job opportunities in New Zealand.

Popular Websites and Their Significance for New Zealand

SkyKiwi emerges as a significant hub for information and discussions relevant to the Chinese diaspora in New Zealand among the popular Chinese-language platforms. It covers various topics, including immigration, community issues, cultural events, and economic opportunities, influencing perceptions and shaping narratives within this demographic segment. Quantitative data revealed that SkyKiwi has consistently high user engagement – according to our website traffic analysis as of February 2024, SkyKiwi received 1.04 million global visits, of which 96% were from New Zealand, making it a key player in shaping public discourse within the Chinese-speaking community. In addition, Chinese-language New Zealand news is a key resource for Chinese-speaking communities in New Zealand. Other significant platforms for the Chinese-speaking community included Tencent and Weibo. These platforms require specific login conditions and highlight the parallel internet culture and infrastructure hosted by China.

Western social media platforms, such as X, Facebook, and Reddit, serve as prominent hubs for French, Spanish, and German, hosting 80% of collected posts in these languages. The widespread conspiracy discourse collected in these languages reflects the recent shift in moderation policies across these websites.

Facebook groups catering to Hindi and Chinese speakers in New Zealand served as virtual community spaces where narratives were shared, debated, and amplified. These groups' growing membership and active participation underscore their significance as platforms for community-driven discourse and information sharing.

Conclusion

Logically's investigation into the foreign-language information environment within New Zealand unveils several crucial aspects of foreign-language online behaviour and its impact on the country's digital landscape.

Key to the analysis of MDM and CIB, Logically identified multiple CIB networks operating in Hindi and Chinese, external to New Zealand. Although two of these networks do not specifically target a New Zealand audience, they discuss New Zealand in a politically charged context.

The Hindi network coordinated on Facebook and X to primarily campaign against Khalistani separatists and against what is deemed 'anti-Indian' sentiment. This network has gained a small amount of engagement from New Zealand as part of a broader effort entangled with Indian politics.

The first of the Chinese language networks was a 150-account-strong network operating on X. It pushed anti-CCP messages and engaged with COVID-19 conspiracy and disinformation narratives. The network, affiliated with the New Federal State of China, gained little significant traction from Chinese-speaking New Zealand audiences.

The second Chinese CIB campaign leveraged influencers with ties to New Zealand to promote narratives and messaging aligned with the CCP, explicitly aimed at diaspora audiences. Despite

focusing on such audiences, this campaign gained little traction from Chinese-speaking New Zealand audiences.

The investigation identified other significant narratives that lack strong resonance with a domestic New Zealand audience. Specifically, anti-vax and conspiracy-themed narratives across French, German, and Spanish languages highlight New Zealand's position in Western post-COVID conspiracy culture. However, these narratives gained little traction among the respective language-speaking residents of New Zealand, indicating nuanced reception and engagement patterns within different linguistic communities. However, due to the prevalence of conspiracy narratives in English in New Zealand, bilingual uptake cannot be ruled out.

In cross-examining collected content geotagged to New Zealand with content in the languages chosen for this report that mentions New Zealand worldwide, Logically identified familiar narratives between global language communities and their New Zealand counterparts. These familiar narratives predominantly revolved around New Zealand domestic politics, New Zealand geopolitics, and Visa and migration issues. This indicates that, generally, foreign-language communities are simply keen to engage with New Zealand issues pertinent to them in their native tongue.

Finally, a notable finding is the unique use of digital infrastructure among the Chinese-speaking population of New Zealand. Unlike other language demographics examined, this group often relies on parallel digital infrastructure, such as social media and news websites, rather than fully adopting Western platforms like Facebook and X.