

SAMOA: UNDERSTANDING AUDIENCES AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION



Context

Samoa is a small island nation in the central South Pacific, made up of two main islands and several smaller islets, with a population of around 220,000¹—most of whom live in rural communities and speak Samoan, though bilingualism with English is common. The country's economy relies on agriculture, tourism, services, and remittances from a large overseas diaspora. Social life is guided by fa'a-Sāmoa, the Samoan way, which emphasises love, respect, discipline, and service, and is deeply rooted in Christianity and traditional village structures. Politically, Samoa blends Westminster-style democracy with its indigenous Fa'amatai system, where family chiefs (matai) play key roles in governance, creating a unique and culturally grounded institutional framework.



Samoa's media landscape is notably pluralistic for a small island state, encompassing state-run, private, church-affiliated, and community broadcasters. Media development began in 1947 with the national broadcaster Radio 2AP and has since expanded to include multiple commercial and faith-based broadcasters, a daily independent newspaper, and an expanding array of digital news services. Key outlets include TV1 Samoa, TV3, EFKS TV2, and the Samoa Observer. However, challenges remain, with media sustainability constrained by limited advertising revenue due to Samoa's market size, urban bias in coverage due to media concentration in Apia, and legal challenges posing concerns around media freedom.

Samoa has one of the highest rates of mobile phone coverage in the Pacific Islands region, with 97% of the nation living within network coverage.² However, some areas continue to be affected by patchy coverage, particularly in remote inland and coastal areas on the island of Savai'i. The Digital Samoa Project, an initiative financed by the World Bank, was launched in February 2025 with the aim of enhancing the capacity and resilience, and enabling inclusive use, of broadband internet. The project includes the deployment of a fibre-optic network to improve digital connectivity across Upolu and Savai'i, and the establishment of public Wi-Fi hotspots in underserved rural areas.³

Like other Pacific Island nations, a shift to online platforms has improved access to media across Samoa, however it has come with a series of risks and challenges. Online misinformation and disinformation were serious issues during the 2019 measles outbreak and the COVID-19 pandemic, when antivaccination sentiment shared online and in-person significantly hindered the public health response.⁴

¹According to the Worldometer website (2025) <https://worldometers.info/world-population/samoa-population/> [Accessed 09/10/2025]

²Fruean, A., Samoa Observer, Mobile coverage reaches 97 per cent (March 2021), <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/samoa/81503> [Accessed 09/10/2025]

³World Bank Group, Samoa – Digitally Connected and Resilient Samoa Project (2024) <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099093024135596945> [Accessed 09/10/2025]

⁴ABC International Development (ABCID), State of the Media: Samoa (2025), <https://www.abc.net.au/abc-international-development/state-of-the-media-samoa-2025/105005638> [Accessed 09/10/2025]

Research Methodology

Data in this research briefing is based on a mixed method research study designed by BBC Media Action. The research was designed to understand the lives of communities in Samoa, their media access, usage and preferences, how information is shared and perceived, and how key national and local issues affect people's lives.

A nationwide mobile phone survey⁵ of 1,068 adults in Samoa aged 18+ was conducted in February and March 2025 by Tebbutt Research. Respondents were sampled via a randomly generated list of mobile phone numbers. Survey quotas were overlaid to ensure accurate representation by sex and age within each province in alignment with most recent population data. At the end of fieldwork, weights were applied to adjust survey proportions where needed. Based on this research methodology, all survey participants had access to a phone, either at home or elsewhere. Therefore, the percentage findings presented in this briefing represent the media habits and preferences of a subset of the Samoa population – that is adults who have access to a mobile phone. As such, the percentage findings presented in this briefing should not be considered representative of the total adult population of Samoa.

Qualitative research was used to complement the nationwide survey. Ten focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted across Samoa's two main islands, Upolu and Savai'i. In each location, the FGDs included women, men and Fa'afaine (a third or distinct gender identity within Samoan culture) aged 18 and over, from marginalised communities and those with lower media access.



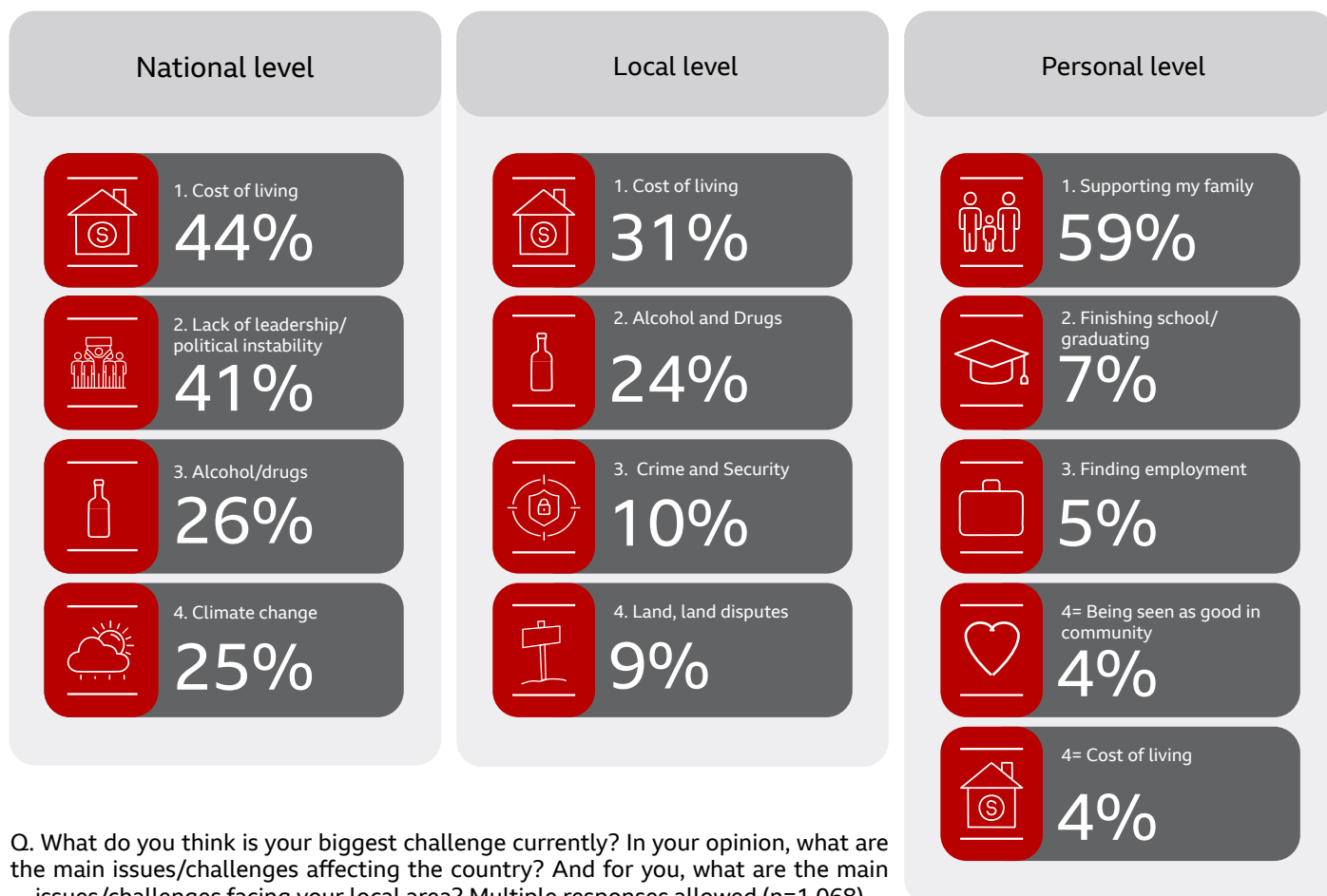
⁵ Although other data collection methods were considered for this research, the costs and logistics of face-to-face interviewing were not feasible in the scope of this study and were unlikely to be able to reach significantly more people in such geographic contexts due to the travel required.

Findings

1. What are the key concerns and issues affecting Samoans?

People were asked in the survey what issues most affected them on a personal, local, and national level. At all levels, financial concerns around the cost of living and supporting families were at the forefront.

Top 4 Challenges:



Reflecting the political instability that characterised the first half of 2025⁶ (over which time the study was implemented) political instability and lack of leadership was a key concern at a national level (mentioned by 41% of respondents). In addition to worries about antisocial behaviour, climate change was mentioned by one in four (25%) respondents and was significantly more likely to be cited by respondents from the Northwest Upolu region⁷.

⁶In 2025, Samoa experienced a period of political uncertainty following a series of internal fractures in the ruling party, failed party unity, and a snap election held in August 2025.

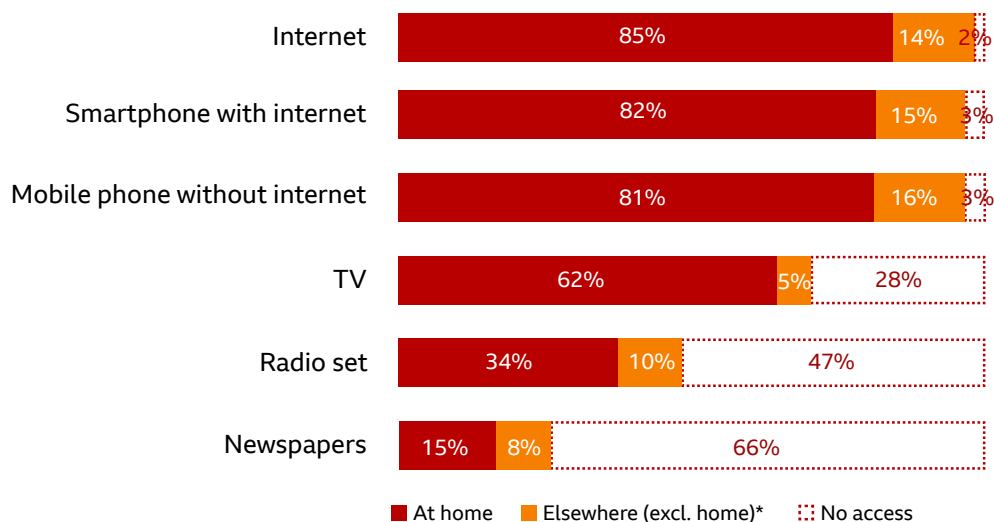
⁷Although exploring the reasons for this finding were beyond the scope of this research, there are several potential explanations that could account for this regional difference. Northwest Upolu's low-lying coastal area makes it more susceptible to impacts such as sea level rises, tropical cyclones and flooding, with past experiences of disasters likely leading to heightened risk perception. It is also an important region for tourism, which is key to the area's economy. Studies also show that education level correlates with concern about climate change, and Northwest Upolu has more access to educational institutions, leading to a better educated populace, more aware of climate science and more exposed to climate adaptation policy discussions, programmes and initiatives.

2. How do people in Samoa access and use media?

DataReportal estimates that 85% of the total Samoan population have a mobile phone in 2025, based on 185,000 active cellular mobile connections.⁸ This figure is likely to account for the vast majority of adults (aged 18 years and over), as around 33% of the Samoan population is aged under 12 years⁹ and are less likely to own a mobile phone. Most mobile connections in Samoa (estimated at around 97%) are broadband enabled, which means that they can connect via 3G, 4G, or 5G mobile networks. However, some subscription plans only include access to voice and SMS services, and the cost of cellular data and limitations of network coverage remain a barrier to access for some, especially those living in remote areas. As such, this broadband figure is not an accurate proxy for estimated mobile internet use, which is likely to be somewhat lower.

BBC Media Action's survey of mobile users in Samoa found that most respondents had access to the internet and smartphones at home, and that these were used frequently. The survey found that people accessed and used broadcast media less. However, it is apparent that the line between broadcast and digital media is becoming increasingly blurred as more users access television and radio via their smartphones.

Overall Media Access and Use Among Mobile Phone Users in Samoa¹¹



*While multiple responses were permitted for the question (i.e. access both at home and elsewhere), this chart presents responses as a single response – i.e. access at home, elsewhere only, or no access.

Q. And do you have access to these media devices in your home or elsewhere? Base n=1,068

⁸According to DataReportal's Digital 2025 - Samoa report. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-samoa> [Accessed 09/10/2025]. Data on mobile phone ownership may overcount coverage among some groups while undercounting coverage among others – statistics refer to the number of connections without considering multiple device ownership amongst individual users. Incidence is also calculated amongst the entire population, rather than just the population of young adults and adults. This is notable in the Samoan context, of which an estimated 33% of the population are aged under 12 years.

⁹Ibid.

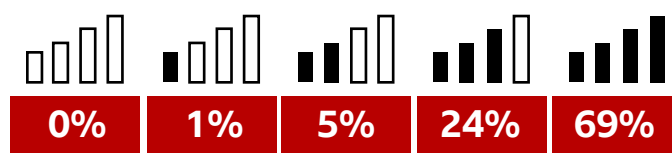
¹⁰DataReportal (2025). Digital 2025 – Samoa. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-samoa> [Accessed 09/10/2025].

¹¹ Findings are representative of a sub-set of the Samoa population – those who have access to a mobile phone

Near universal access to internet and smartphones, with some notable exceptions

Among Samoan adults (aged 18 and over) with access to a mobile phone, access to the internet is near universal – 98% of respondents report having access to the internet, predominantly at home (85%). Similarly, 97% of respondents report access to a smartphone (82% at home),¹² indicating that internet use in Samoa is predominantly via mobile internet.¹³ Network coverage for most is strong, with 93% having at least three bars at home, although some audiences reported that network coverage can be patchy in remote areas of Samoa. Audiences commonly reported sharing a smartphone, generally among immediate family members (i.e. parents, spouses, siblings) and mostly within the household, indicating that although access is broad, individual smartphone ownership is slightly less widespread. Older respondents (aged 45+), those with no family income, and those living in urban Apia¹⁴ are significantly less likely to have at-home access to a smartphone or the internet.

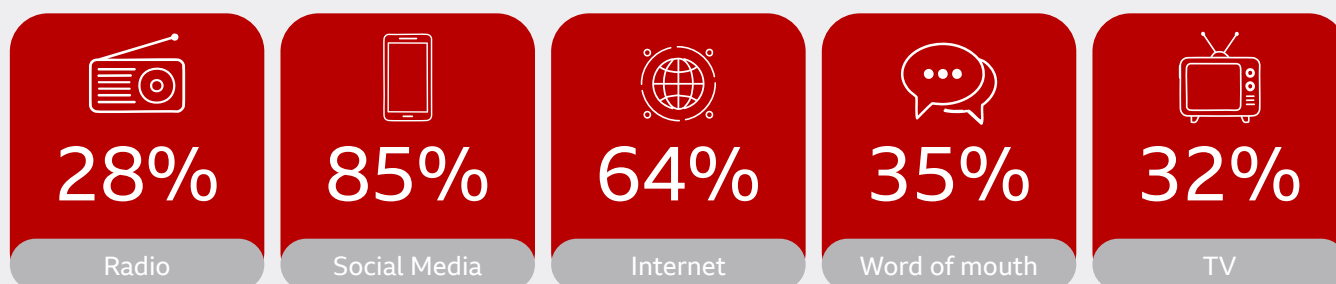
Network coverage at home



Q. How many network bars do you have on your phone where you live? Base: n=1,062 (respondents who have access to a mobile phone or smartphone)

Daily media use

Q: How frequently do you do the following, if at all? Base: n=1068



¹² This high level of smartphone access (and ownership) is also reflected among audiences who took part in the qualitative research, of whom all but one owned a smartphone.

¹³ This inference is supported by a study conducted by UNCDF in 2023, which found that it is likely that most Samoans access the internet via smartphone rather than some other digital device. See UNCDF Assess Digital and Financial Literacy in Samoa (2023), <https://www.uncdf.org/article/8489/assessing-digital-and-financial-literacy-in-samoa> [Accessed 20/10/2025].

¹⁴ This regional difference is likely due to a range of socio-economic factors. The high levels of unemployment in urban Apia, with extended families often living together in poverty, is likely to account for lower levels of direct access to smartphones in this area. In addition, families in rural areas often receive stronger financial support through remittances from relatives overseas, as well as items like TV sets and mobile phones to help stay connected while managing family affairs. Connectivity in rural areas may also benefit from fewer users sharing the network compared to urban areas.

High daily smartphone use is driven by social media connectivity

The overall high level of at home access to the internet and smartphones is reflected in high daily use of social media (85%) and the internet (64%).¹⁵ Audiences report high use of their smartphones throughout the day, with many saying they are constantly using their phone to check Facebook, read news, watch TV and connect with family and friends.

Over half of survey respondents (53%) report spending more than one hour on their phone every day, with 35% saying they spend at least three hours. People who are young (aged 18-24 years), university-educated, and have a high income are significantly more likely to use their phone for more than three hours per day. Furthermore, two in three respondents (68%) spend more than 30 Samoan tala per month on their phone, with audiences reporting that they often use up all their data, using their phone until it has run out.

Frequency of Media Use Among Mobile Phone Users in Samoa

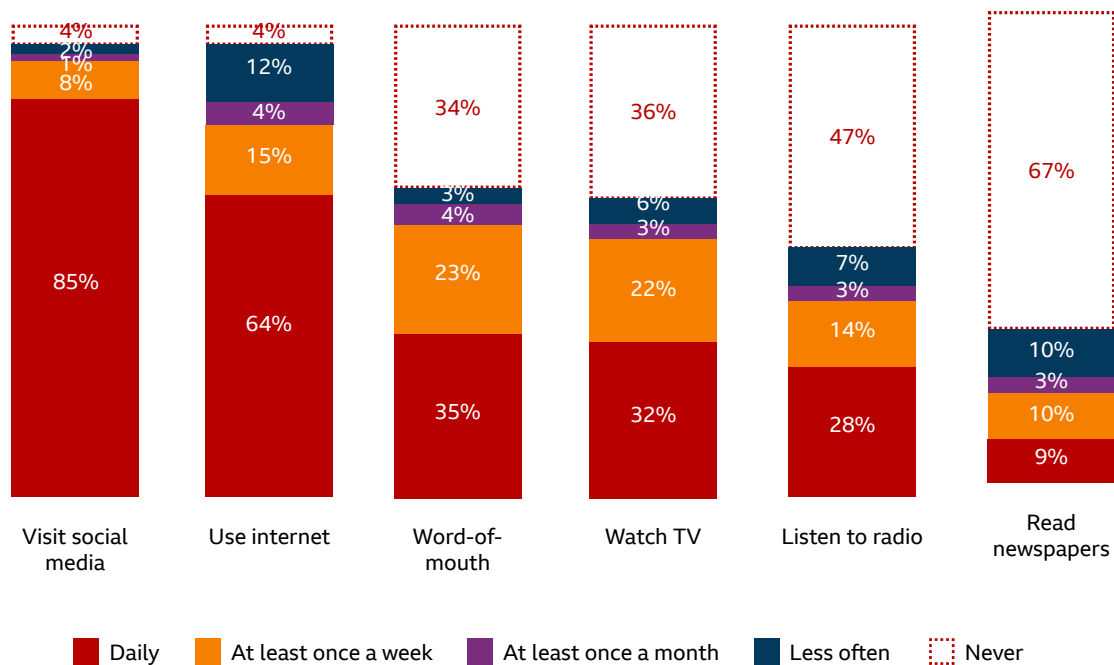


Chart excludes DK and REF responses

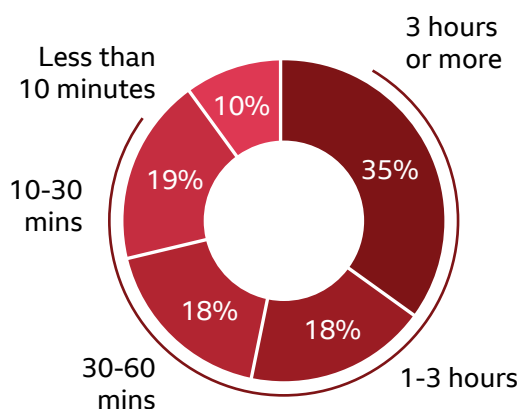
Q: How frequently do you do the following, if at all? Base: n=1,068

“ For me, it’s the phone. I use it all the time, I get my news from all over the world, it’s got local news on the phone too, and TV channels and newspapers now. Everything is on the phone now. You can find out what’s happening in other villages now, any fa’alavelave [village gatherings, funerals], the phone is the fastest way to connect. ”

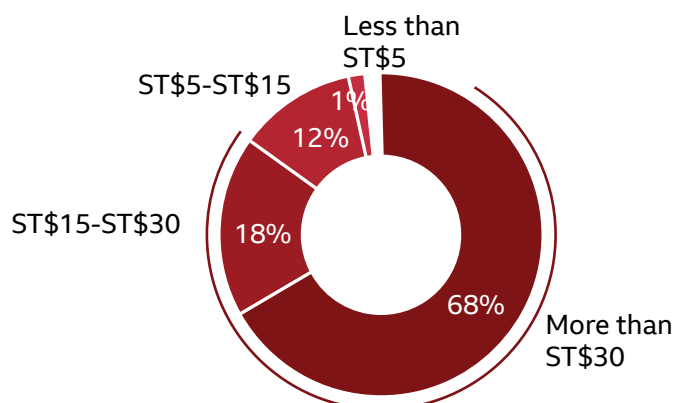
– Female, age 36-54, Rural, Savai’i, Asau

¹⁵ The discrepancy in these figures (where daily use rates are not aligned, despite use of social media requiring access to the internet) suggests some confusion or misinterpretation around what ‘using the internet’ entails among respondents. This issue may have arisen partly due to the way in which the survey questions were asked. The survey asked: “How frequently do you use the Internet (including WhatsApp, Telegram)?” and “How frequently do you visit social media pages like Facebook, Instagram, etc.” This may have led to misinterpretation among some survey respondents in terms of specific use of apps like WhatsApp etc. as opposed to using/browsing the internet generally. Furthermore, respondents may not be conscious that they are using the internet when they access social media, especially via apps on smartphones. It can be inferred that the higher figure (for frequency of social media use) is the effective rate of internet usage among respondents.

Time Spent on Mobile Phone
(in average day)



Monthly Spend on Mobile Phone
(Samoan Tala)



Older people (those aged 45+) use the internet least and are significantly more likely to be among those who use the internet less often than monthly (12% among all mobile users vs. 16% among 45+) or never (4% vs. 7%).

Barriers to internet and smartphone use were described by audiences in qualitative discussion as primarily the cost of data and phone credit, as well as some areas of poor quality or inconsistent network coverage. The high cost of devices was also noted by respondents.

“

Sometimes 5G doesn't work on phones, so it depends on the type of phone, and not everyone has access to this. So sometimes this affects people who are in villages that have limited coverage. 5G is better for those places. So, I think it's not fair, because it's very expensive.

”

– Woman, 18-35, Urban Upol

Brick phones remain a prevalent secondary option in Samoa, despite high use of smartphones

Ownership of non-internet enabled mobile phones (known as 'brick phones') is particularly high in Samoa - 81% of survey respondents report having a brick phone at home. The strong signal and long battery life of simpler phones provides a crucial connection in areas where internet infrastructure is limited or costly.



Television remains popular in Samoa

While a distant second to digital media, television is a valued platform in Samoa, with access and use relatively common. 62% of survey respondents report access to a television at home, and 28% watch it daily. Within a broader context of declining traditional media use in the Pacific, this represents a reasonably high level of access and use - television access in Samoa is second only to Fiji, where 75% have TV at home. Television audiences spread their viewership across several channels, with TV1, TV2, TV3 and TV5 the most popular, and peak viewing time is in the evening between 7 and 10pm. Notably, television content is increasingly consumed on-demand, and often independently, by audiences via online devices.

“ I usually use my phone to watch YouTube, Netflix and read novels.

– Woman, 18-34, Rural Upolu

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Radio retains a core listenership, increasingly accessed online

While far fewer respondents report having access to a radio set (44%, with 34% reporting access at home) as compared with TV access, radio listenership remains considerable and is on par with TV viewership: 28% of survey respondents say they listen to the radio daily.

Notably, women and younger people (aged 18-24 years) are significantly more likely to report never listening to the radio (53% and 59%, respectively), while males are significantly more likely to be daily listeners (32%).

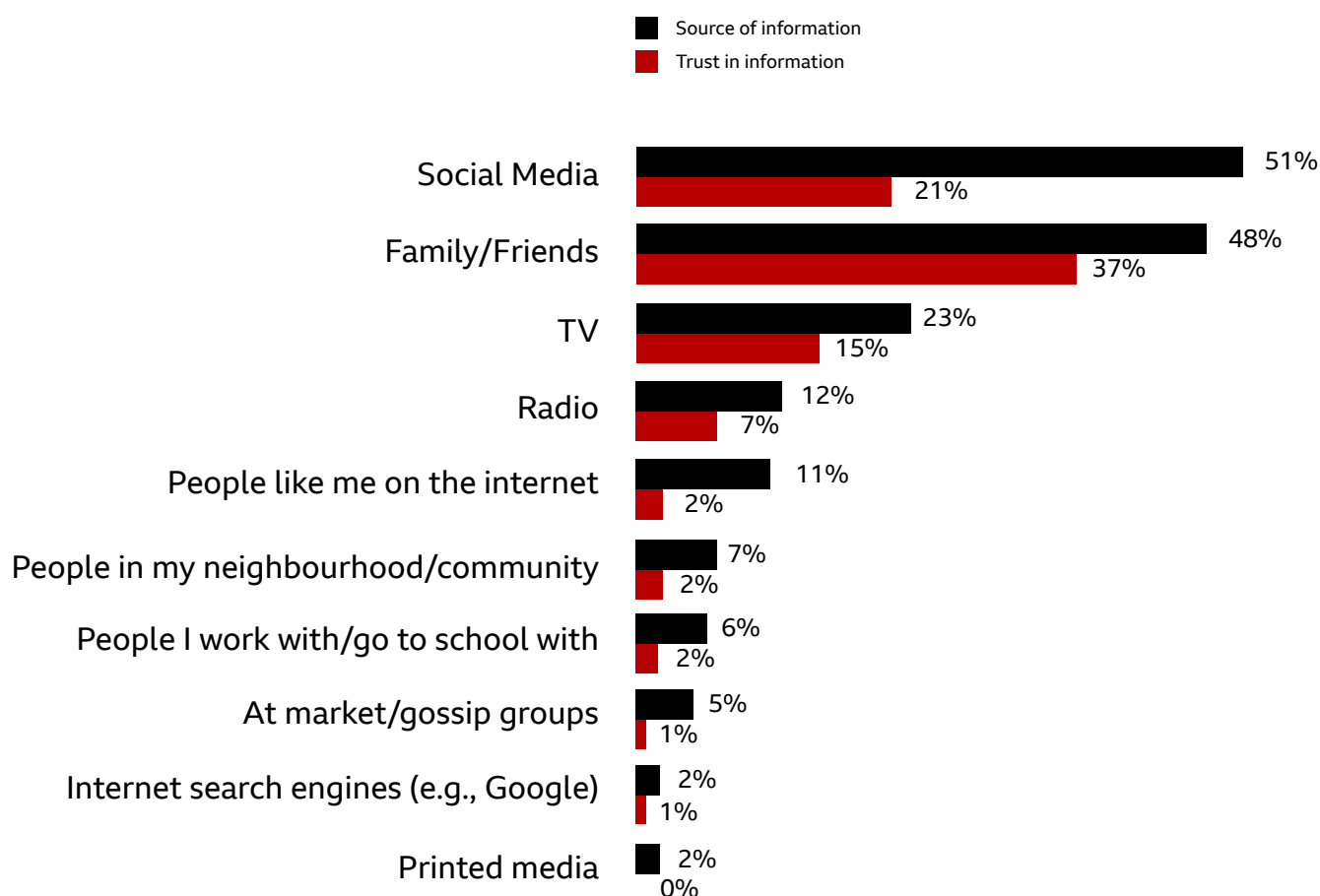
Comparatively, fewer respondents have access to print newspapers (23%), with 67% of respondents saying they never read them.



3. How are Samoans consuming and sharing news and information?

With the widespread use of smartphones, digital media—particularly social media platforms like Facebook—has become the primary source of information. Alongside this, in-person word-of-mouth communication continues to be a central feature of how Samoans share and verify news, reflecting deep-rooted cultural and community networks. While traditional media such as radio, television, and newspapers are less frequently used in their original formats, they remain key reference points for trusted information, with much of their content now also accessed through online platforms.

Sources of trusted information



27% don't trust any sources

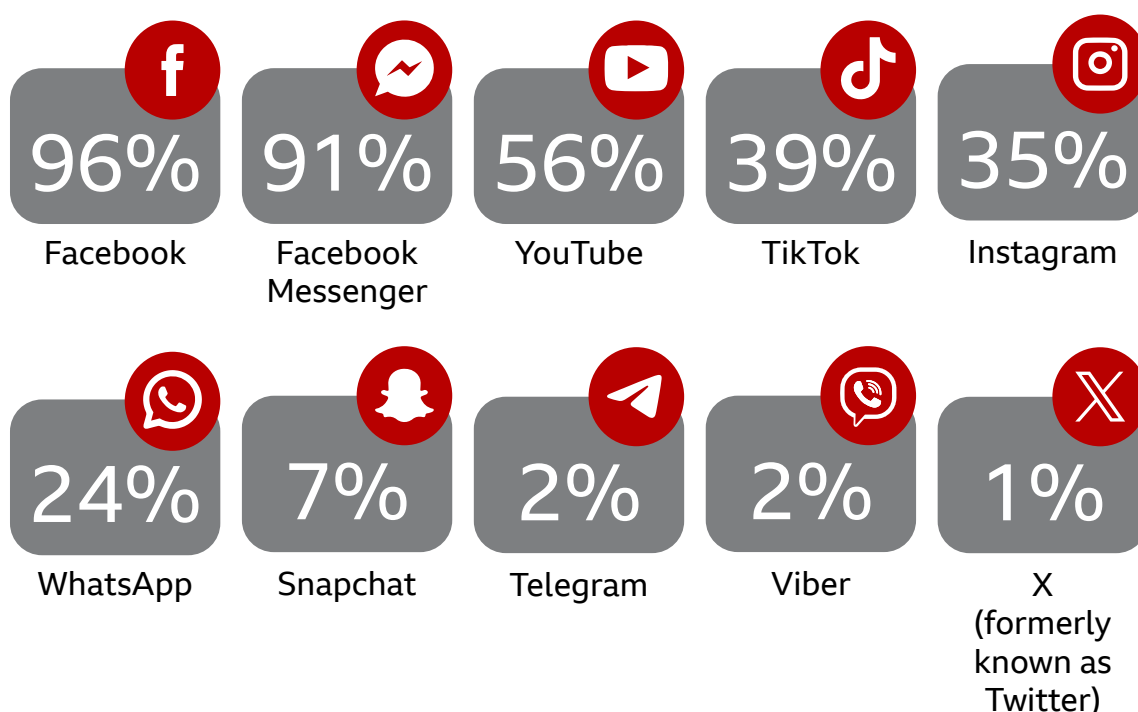
Q. Where or who do you usually go to find information about the issues? Base: n=1,068

Q. Among the sources you have mentioned, which ones do you trust? Base: n=1,047
(respondents who mention a source)

Samoans are primarily getting their news and information via informal sources

For many Samoans, social media is the first port of call for news and information, followed by social networks - primarily family and friends. Among social media platforms, Facebook is by far the most used, with audiences describing it as the first thing they check in the morning, and then consistently throughout the day for updates. Many users also engage in information sharing on these platforms, 46% often 'liking' content and 45% posting their own. While widely and frequently used as a source of news and information, trust in social media remains low. Facebook was consistently described by audiences as the platform they used the most and trusted the least. As many as 27% of Samoans say they don't trust any sources of information.

Use of platforms in last month:



Q: Which of the following social media or messaging apps have you used in the last month, if any?

Base: n=950 (users of social media or internet)

Sharing of word-of-mouth information is part of the Samoan cultural fabric. Community groups provide an important network for information, with Samoans often referring to this as 'gossip'. Particularly in places like rural Savai'i, people talk of turning to "bingo ladies" who are typically well-informed about issues, as well as village committees, pastors or schools. Friends and family networks engender greater trust as a source of news and information than social media, and, especially in rural communities, the church and religious leaders are an important and trusted part of people's information repertoire.

“ ...Samoans always do that, if you can't get information from media sources, then you go and ask people face to face, or to your girlfriends, or to other families, that's another way to collect information, and people are seeking different opinions not just one source. You use your feet to collect the information. ”

– Female, 18-34, Rural Apia



Television and radio are less used, but have an important role as reference points for trusted news and information

Television and radio are much less frequently used but remain trusted and authoritative sources of news and information for Samoans. With the growing use of social media, traditional broadcast channels are increasingly used as a secondary or supplementary source, relied on to verify and confirm stories heard online or through word-of-mouth. Audiences reported trusting content most when it came from professional journalists, like those on 'Good Morning Samoa'. Samoa Broadcasting Corporation's (SBC) TV1¹⁶ and its flagship news programme Tala Fou were often cited as the most trusted source of news, due to its use of credible, first-hand information, which is then widely shared across other media outlets. Their established presence, local news coverage, and reputation for accuracy make television and radio key reference points in Samoa, and as such, they continue to play an essential role in maintaining public trust and ensuring reliable information reaches communities.



“ There is a difference between news broadcast on Tala Fou news and what's on Facebook. Tala Fou, they are well known, and they also have people here on the ground who are capturing and filming the news so it's real, but on Facebook you can't trust the sources, because too many bring lies. ”

– Male, 18-34, Rural Savai'i

¹⁶ SBC TV1 is described as Samoa's national television station, broadcasting in both Samoan and English.

4. What do Samoans think of the media?

Samoans generally show a strong interest in keeping up with the news: 64% of survey respondents stated that they were very interested in news. This is reflected in the type of programming survey respondents reported being exposed to - predominantly news and current affairs (68%), followed by sports (34%) and politics (31%).

Interest in News

Very interested



Not interested



Q. How interested are you in news? Base: n=1,068

Perceptions of widespread misinformation on social media are likely shaped by past experiences

More than half of respondents (52%) believe they encounter false or misleading information on a daily basis and a further 35% say they encounter it weekly. Audiences specifically cite social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok as having a prevalence of second-hand and fabricated information, with key instigators identified as politicians, government officials, and journalists, as well as the general public. They expressed concern about a range of false information spreading within the community, with political disinformation seen as a major issue, along with misinformation concerning the health and safety of women and children, and false reports of death.

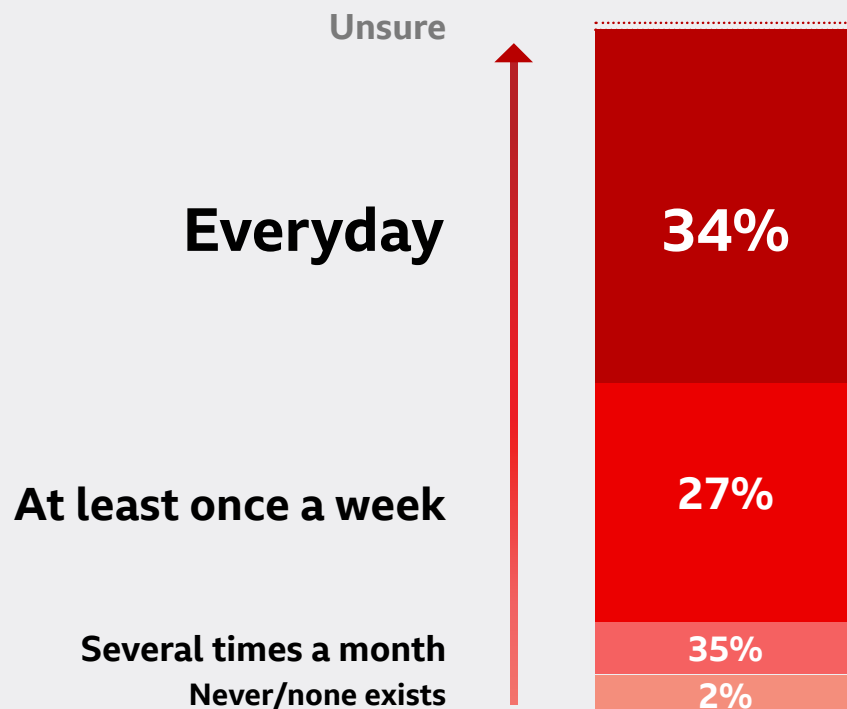
These perceptions are likely born out of the country's previous experiences of misinformation, particularly during the 2019 measles epidemic¹⁷ and the lead-up to the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁸. During these public health crises, anti-vaccination messages spread both online and in communities, impeding the public health responses. Social media also played a significant role in spreading mis/disinformation during the 2021 national elections, which were marked by political tension and public debate following the election of Samoa's first female prime minister.¹⁹ In response, Facebook imposed a temporary "social media blackout" to curb harmful content, while local media served as a vital source of accurate information throughout the crisis.

¹⁷AFP Australia (2019) Experts: Samoa's measles outbreak is caused by underimmunisation – not the vaccine itself. <https://factcheck.afp.com/experts-samoas-measles-outbreak-caused-underimmunisation-not-vaccine-itself> [Accessed 21/10/2025]

¹⁸ABCID (2023) Curb the Infodemic: Vaccine hesitancy, misinformation and confusion. <https://www.abc.net.au/abc-international-development/pacmas-infodemic-social-media-tracker-four/13529296> [Accessed 21/10/2025]

¹⁹ABC Pacific (2021) Social media plays a key role in Samoa's election but also raises alarms <https://www.abc.net.au/pacific/programs/pacificbeat/samoa-social-elex/13293222> [Accessed 21/10/2025]

Perceived Frequency of Exposure to False and Misleading Information



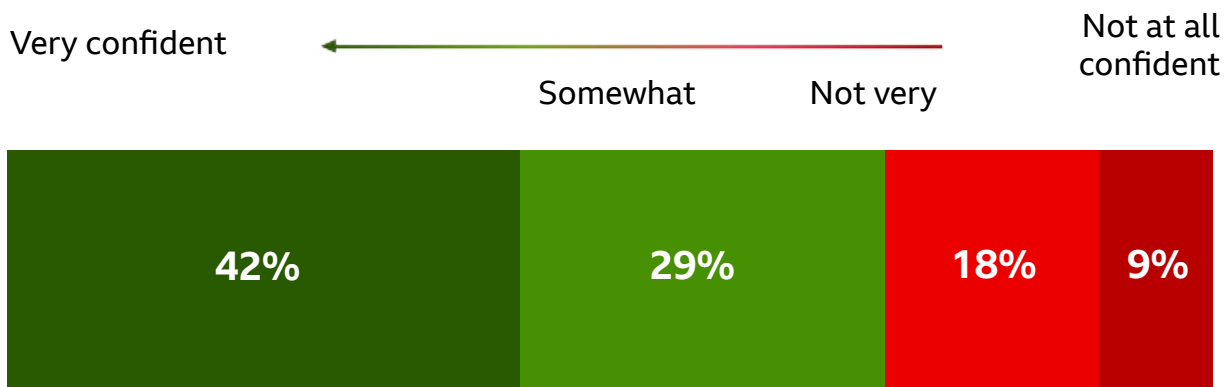
Q. How frequently do you come across information that you think is false or misleading? Base: n=1,068

Limited media literacy is apparent in attitudes and practices around information sharing

Many Samoans feel confident that they can identify false information when they encounter it: 71% feel at least somewhat confident in their ability to identify false information (42% feel very confident). Notably however, attitudes and practices around information sharing demonstrate limited media literacy. For example, a majority (64%) agree that it's more important that information is shared quickly, rather than checked for accuracy. And it is those with the least confidence in their ability to identify false information who are most likely to value speed over accuracy when sharing information.

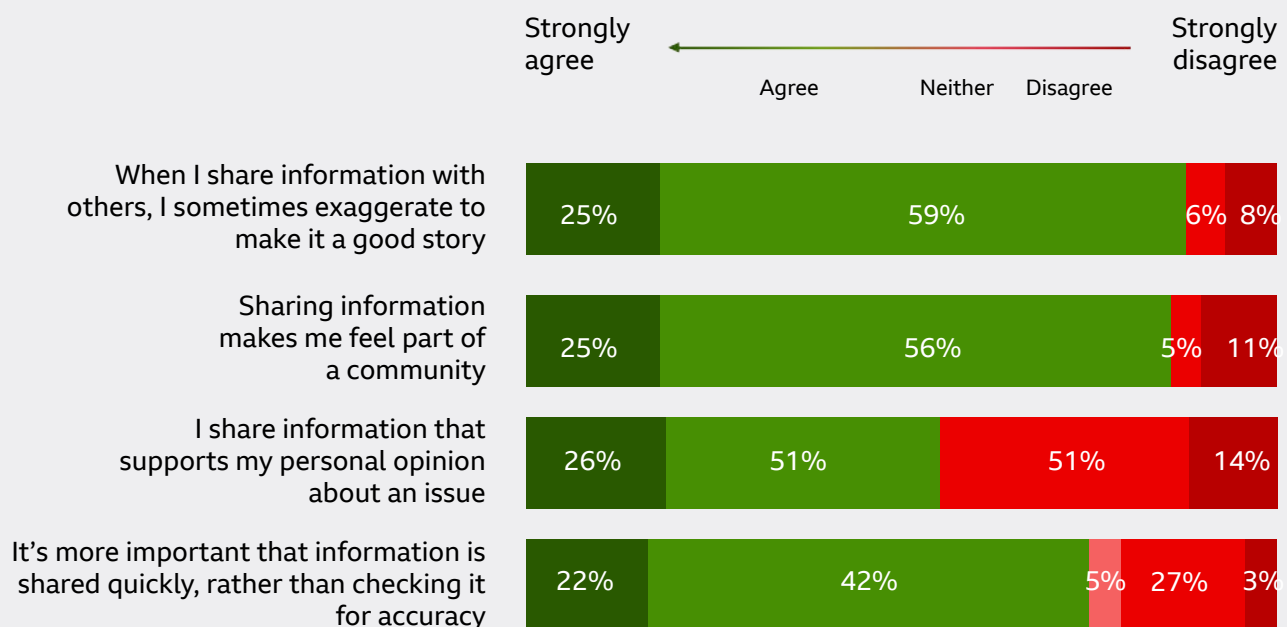


Claimed Confidence in Own Ability to Identify False Information



Q. How confident are you in your ability to identify false or misleading information? Base: n=1,068

Perceptions of Information Sharing



Q. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statements ...? Base: n=1,068

Although some audiences claim to engage in verification behaviour, methods are not always reliable. The primary means of verification is through personal networks and word-of-mouth, particularly in villages where information flows via pastors, women's committees, youth groups, and matai chiefs. To check the validity of information, audiences report attempting to approach the source of the news or calling friends and relatives who they think might know more. Facebook comments are also used to gauge the truthfulness of shared information. Others report verifying news by cross-checking against trusted television or radio news broadcasts, particularly TV1's Tala Fou as well as Radio Samoa and 2AP.



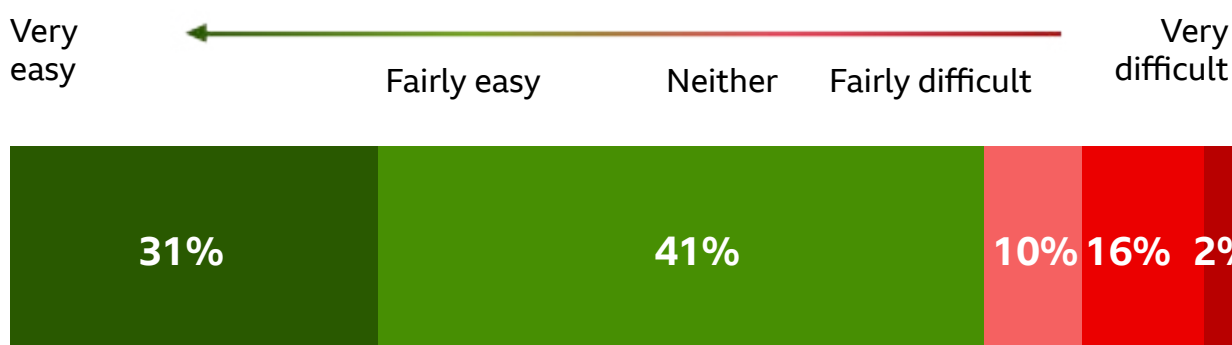
“ There are lots of people in Samoa who create bad news and get paid for it. They create fake pages to cause disruption. ... I just go straight to Tala Fou to verify anything that I don't trust, like what's happening in politics. People are taking information from both and creating a lot of posts about their campaigns, whether they are fake or not. God will sort it out. ”

– Woman, 35-54, Rural Savai'i

5. What are the barriers to people being informed?

With strong mobile penetration and fairly reliable network coverage, most people in Samoa have ready access to phones and digital communication. The main constraint to staying informed is the cost of data and frequent loss of phone credit, rather than lack of access itself. With social networks also playing a key role in sharing information, most feel well connected to news and updates. This is reflected in the high proportion of survey respondents who find it either very easy (31%) or fairly easy (41%) to find information on issues that matter to them. This is particularly the case for those in urban Apia, where respondents were significantly more likely to feel information is easy to find than those elsewhere in the country

Perceived Ease of Finding Information



Q. How easy or difficult is it for you to find information about issues that matter to you?

Base: n=1,068

Language is not a barrier to being informed

Most news in Samoa is delivered in Samoan or a mix of Samoan and English, and audiences generally felt well served in terms of language accessibility. Notably, those with a lower income were less likely to receive news and information in their preferred language. Some audiences perceived the bilingual presentation of radio news as being aimed more at diaspora listeners than at local audiences.

Availability of News and Information in Preferred Language



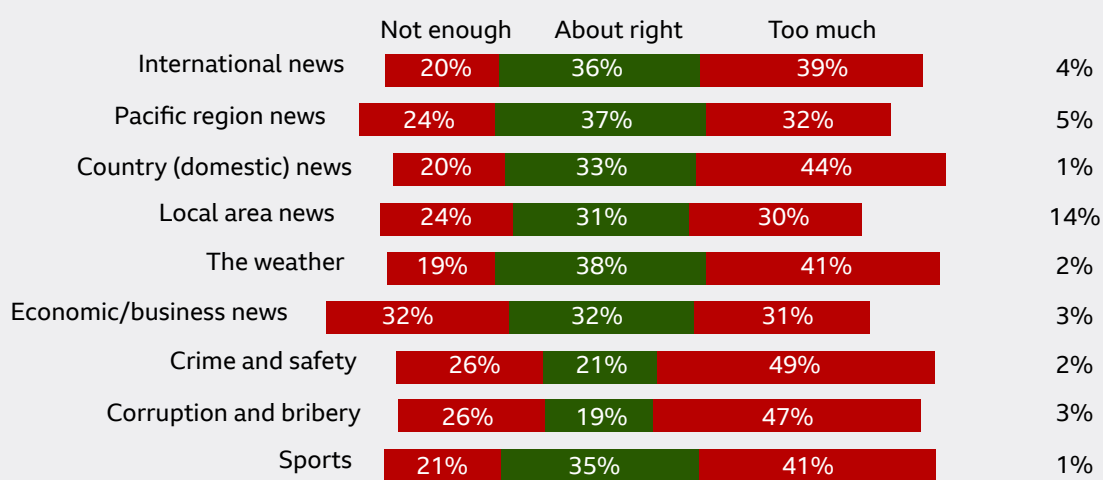
Q. Do you get news and information from the media in your preferred language? n=1,060



6. What do people want to see from the media?

Gaps in news and current affairs content identified by survey participants most notably included coverage of economic and business news, while audiences tended to feel there was too much news around crime and safety, and corruption and bribery. Those earning higher incomes are particularly prone to feeling the absence of economic news and information in the media.

Perception of the Adequacy of News and Current Affairs Content

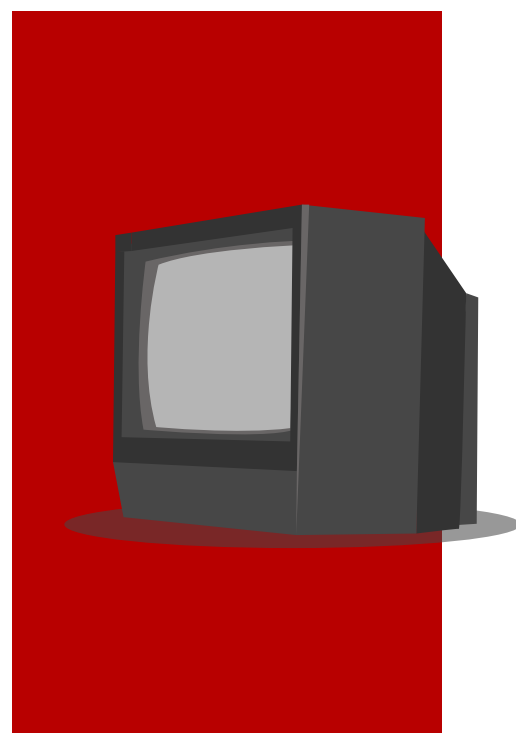


Q. Thinking generally about the news and current affairs available in the country, do you think that there is too much, about the right amount, not enough, or no media coverage about...? Base: n=1,060 (media users)

Audiences cited a scarcity of local area news and locally relevant content, particularly in terms of documentaries and historical programming. Some expressed concern about educational content being displaced by television dramas from other countries, and children increasingly being drawn to cartoons from abroad, often via their phones. Instead they sought more content that would bolster access to education and support youth development.

Audiences also noted a gap in positive media representation of people with disabilities and the Fa'afafine community, with a need for inclusive platforms that give voice to marginalised groups. This sat alongside a broader desire for media coverage to promote peace and harmony within communities.

Audiences noted a desire to preserve and promote Samoan culture, share local traditions, and support family values. They also cited a need for entertainment and lifestyle content that reflects real Samoan life and pride in Samoan culture.



7. Recommendations

Targeted training to prioritise quality content and engender public trust and engagement. Providing targeted training to help journalists produce in-depth, high-quality reports will go beyond surface-level information and help build public trust. There is a clear need for content strategies that address audience need both on traditional as well as digital media. This involves diversifying content based on audience needs and feedback, and building a more vibrant and responsive media ecosystem.

Media literacy education to help audiences discern fact from misinformation is critical. With the rise of social media, it is critical to equip the population with the skills to identify and combat information disorder (mis/disinformation). Public awareness campaigns and workshops in communities involving village chiefs, religious leaders and schools should focus on providing practical tools to help people critically evaluate information and use social media responsibly. This can also be supported by developing educational videos that model best practices in digital skills and can be shared widely.

Increase availability of localised news and information. To address the demand for more relevant news, media outlets should prioritise content that reflects the lives of Samoans. This includes creating or placing journalists and reporters in different provinces to ensure comprehensive coverage of local issues like community development, economic challenges, crime, and corruption. By featuring inspiring stories and positive content on topics such as agriculture, fisheries, climate change, and entrepreneurship, media can better serve community interests and needs.

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