

STATE OF THE MEDIA SAMOA

RESEARCH BRIEF

ABC
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

PACMAS
Pacific Media Assistance Scheme

THE UNIVERSITY
of ADELAIDE

AT A GLANCE



1. Print media have declining audience share but set an important quality benchmark



2. Challenges for media to remain financially viable



3. Media needs ongoing support to meet digitalisation challenges



4. Critical role of industry bodies in regulating the media sector

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This report provides a detailed, up-to-date snapshot of the state of the media in Samoa. It is part of the State of the Media project, which comprises 12 country reports and one regional report. These reports serve as an accessible resource for media, civil society, and government organisations in support of development goals in the region.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a multi-method approach. The research team began with a desk-based review of relevant primary and secondary literature, before conducting nine stakeholder interviews with media practitioners. At each step, feedback and advice were sought from the Samoan media expert advisers, Lanuola Tusani Ah Tong and Victoria Lepou, who also crosschecked the accuracy of findings and co-authored this report. The research was approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee and steps were taken to mitigate risks to all research participants, including maintaining their anonymity.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Print media have declining audience share but set an important quality benchmark

Traditional media such as print newspapers have a decreasing audience share compared with online platforms, including digital TV and news organisations' social media. This is in part due to increased printing costs, which have meant that daily print circulation has dropped by about 40 per cent nationally since 2020. Despite this, the commercial newspaper the Samoa Observer (in both print and digital form) is perceived by media practitioner respondents as having provided the benchmark for "best-practice" journalism since its inception. This showcases the value of well-researched public interest news stories.

2. Challenges for media to remain financially viable

All interviewed media practitioners from government and commercial media reported challenges in remaining financially viable. Although media ownership in Samoa is diverse, respondents from privately owned media organisations stated that they struggle to sustain a consistent income to support their operations. They acknowledged that more sustainable options for revenue generation are required, including monetisation of digital content. They also stated that digitisation necessitates the use of more up-to-date technology, to monetise online content (e.g. paywalls) and to keep up with industry changes in how content is presented. This has proved challenging with limited financial resources.

3. Media needs ongoing support to meet digitalisation challenges

Although the shift to online platforms has improved access to media across Samoa, 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. Increasing reporters' skills in spotting and debunking mis- and disinformation has thus become a critical need, to ensure accurate and balanced reporting is sustained. Further, media practitioner respondents from smaller media outlets expressed a desire to learn how to use technology to streamline editorial workflows in the newsroom. They view this as especially important when staff resourcing is limited to meet reporting obligations and audience demands.

4. Critical role of industry bodies in regulating the media sector

Samoa media have been challenged by restrictions to freedom of speech and the lack of a legislated right to information (RTI). The reintroduction of criminal defamation laws has had a significant effect on journalists' ability to report freely.¹ The establishment of the Media Council in 2017, alongside the Journalists Association of Samoa (JAWS), which was established in 1991, is viewed as a welcome development by media practitioner respondents. However, respondents reported that the ability of these bodies to regulate the media sector and support journalists has been hampered by a lack of funding.

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Disclaimer: Any opinions represented in this report are those of the authors and research participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation or the University of Adelaide.

¹ Civicus Monitor - Defamation Laws Being Used to Silence Criticism in Samoa, September 27, 2019
<https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/defamation-laws-being-used-silence-criticism-samoa/>