

STATE OF THE MEDIA FIJI

RESEARCH BRIEF

ABC
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT


PACMAS
Pacific Media Assistance Scheme

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AT A GLANCE



1. Media sector adapting to post-MIDA environment



2. Media access to official information remains a challenge



3. Lack of equipment and resourcing in newsrooms

4. Artificial intelligence cautiously leveraged by media



5. Media Facebook pages as primary news source for audiences

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This report provides a detailed, up-to-date snapshot of the state of the media in Fiji. 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. Additionally, 27 stakeholder interviews with media practitioners and audience members were conducted, followed by a targeted online audience survey on media consumption patterns to contextualise the interview findings. At each step, feedback and advice was sought from the Fiji country media expert adviser, Richard Najdu, who cross-checked 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. Media sector adapting to post-MIDA environment

Media practitioner respondents noted that Fijian media must be strengthened to be able to exercise the freedom it now enjoys with the repeal of the Media Industry Development Act (MIDA), which had curtailed media's ability to report freely for over a decade. Most media practitioner respondents highlighted that the repeal of MIDA brings with it a sense of uncertainty, as it involves moving away from historically entrenched values of self-censorship. The transition from working under a restrictive environment to one without MIDA requires a period of adjustment that, according to media practitioners, needs to be supported across the sector by the Fijian Media Association through awareness sessions and training.

2. Media access to official information remains a challenge

Although Fiji's Information Act 2018 protects the right of public access to information, at the time of writing the act has not been gazetted and is hence not in force. As such, most media practitioner respondents were not aware of the act or its provisions. Respondents also described challenges in accessing official information from the government, with departmental media units typically not responding to information requests in a timely manner. This has led to journalists forgoing story leads due to a lack of information.

3. Lack of equipment and resourcing in newsrooms

Despite the continued resilience of the media sector and its recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic problems remain around lack of media equipment and staff, particularly for small- to medium-sized media businesses. Media practitioner respondents from smaller organisations noted a lack of digital equipment (including cameras) to break stories online, which (as news consumption continues to pivot to social media platforms) leads to a competitive disadvantage against larger media organisations. Lack of newsroom staff has also meant that media are not able to chase all their leads, often having to either forgo a story or assign a non-journalist (e.g. driver) to cover it.

4. Artificial intelligence cautiously leveraged by media

More than 50 per cent of media practitioner respondents acknowledged using artificial intelligence (AI) programs such as ChatGPT in their work. Media practitioner respondents noted that, while the use of AI enhances their work, they were cautious for it not to interfere with the human element in their writing, preferring to apply it as part of their editing process, as a research tool, or in drafting social media posts. Most media practitioner respondents also saw the value of AI in supporting search engine optimisation (SEO), to generate keywords that can be tagged to content for better online search visibility.

5. Media Facebook pages as primary news source for audiences

Among audience survey respondents, 78 per cent highlighted that the Facebook pages of established media organisations, such as the Fiji Times, remain their primary news source. The main motivation behind accessing news via Facebook is the low cost of data and non-paywalled content.

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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.