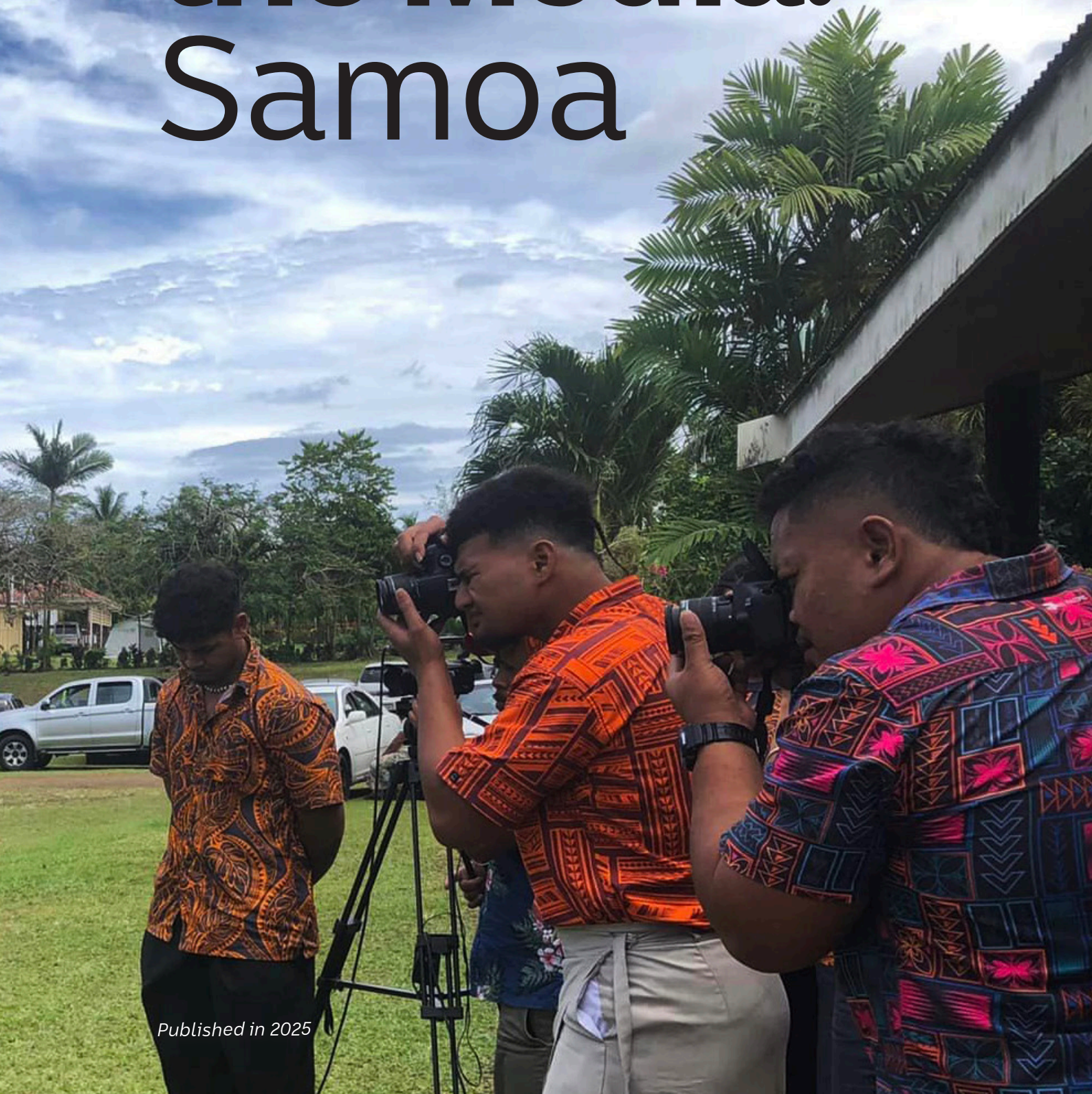


# State of the Media: Samoa



# *State of the Media: Samoa*

*This study was led and designed by ABC International Development (ABCID), informed by our Pacific partners. The University of Adelaide's (UoA) Stretton Institute were implementation partners across the 12 countries studied. Fieldwork and data analysis was conducted by Pacific researchers. We would like to thank all the expert advisers and study participants for their time and generous contributions.*

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*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.*

*Photos in this report are from ABCID programs, ABC staff, and ABC archives, unless otherwise specified.*

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*Savaia, Samoa.*

# ACRONYMS

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>AI</b>      | artificial intelligence  |
| <b>ABC</b>     | Australian Broadcasting Corporation  |
| <b>ABCID</b>   | Australian Broadcasting Corporation International Development  |
| <b>AM</b>      | amplitude modulation   |
| <b>CGTN</b>    | China Global Television Network  |
| <b>EFKS</b>    | Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa   |
| <b>GEDSI</b>   | Gender equality, disability and social inclusion   |
| <b>IPTV</b>    | Internet Protocol television   |
| <b>JAWS</b>    | Journalists Association of (Western) Samoa   |
| <b>LGBTIQ+</b> | lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer<br>and other sexually and gender diverse people |
| <b>MCIT</b>    | Ministry of Communications and Information Technology  |
| <b>N/A</b>     | not applicable   |
| <b>NGO</b>     | non-government organisation  |
| <b>OoTR</b>    | Office of the Regulator  |
| <b>PacLII</b>  | Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute  |
| <b>RNZ</b>     | Radio New Zealand  |
| <b>RTI</b>     | Right to Information   |
| <b>VSAT</b>    | very small aperture terminal   |



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an up-to-date snapshot of Samoa's media landscape in 2024. It outlines how the shift to digital broadcasting and increased availability of internet access have transformed the media landscape. The following themes were identified in the research.

## 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.

## 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.

## 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.



*2AP and TV9 Reporter Matauina Isaako rehearses a piece to camera.*

## Critical role of industry bodies in regulating the media sector

Samoan 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.<sup>1</sup> The establishment of the Media Council in 2017, alongside the Journalists Association of Samoa (JAWS), which was established in 1991,<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> [Civics Monitor - Defamation Laws Being Used to Silence Criticism in Samoa](#), September 27, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> This date reflects when the Journalist Association of Western Samoa was duly incorporated on the 31st of October, 1991 however some sources suggest the association has been active as early as 1975.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

*Samoa is located in the Polynesian subregion of the Pacific Islands, to the north-east of Fiji. It has a population of 201,000 people spread across four inhabited islands and several smaller islands and outcrops. As the first Pacific Island country to emerge from colonisation in 1962, Samoa is governed by a parliamentary democracy. It has a large diaspora, concentrated in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States.*





*Reporter Rose Setefano and Camera Operator Iasepi Masoe record an interview.*

The media landscape in Samoa consists of print media, radio, television, and online news. It is dominated by independent outlets. The Samoa Observer is the largest newspaper and is published daily. It has gained a reputation for being “a watchdog of the government and for giving a voice to the public”.<sup>3</sup> The government newspaper, Savali, first published in 1906, is produced as a weekly bilingual paper and a monthly Samoan-language gazette. There are a dozen radio broadcasters, nine television broadcasters, 10 television channels, and five prominent online news services, including the Samoa Observer’s online platform and Talamua Online News.<sup>4</sup>

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. In addition to Samoa, the countries studied are: Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

<sup>3</sup> [\*Grace Elkus - Perspectives of Print Media in Samoa: Considering Varying Viewpoints on its Role in Society PDF.\*](#)

<sup>4</sup> [\*BBC - Samoa Media Guide, December 19, 2023.\*](#)



## 2. METHODOLOGY

*The study's methodology was guided by core research questions identified by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's International Development unit (ABCID). It was designed to foreground the expertise of Pacific researchers and media professionals. Data collection, analysis, and report drafting were conducted by Pacific researchers.*

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.

A more detailed discussion of the project methodology is contained in the regional report.<sup>5</sup>

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5 [ABC International Development - Research.](#)





*Practical satellite training for Samoa's broadcast technicians.*





## 3. MEDIA ORGANISATION FOOTPRINT

*The media landscape in Samoa is dominated by independent outlets and consists of print, radio, television, and online news platforms. The vibrancy of the sector has meant that most media organisations cover multiple topics and niche areas, from news (including disaster-related information) to entertainment. Print newspapers such as the Samoa Observer have built a legacy around their dedication to robust and balanced reporting, representing the benchmark for quality journalism in the country.*



*Members of the Samoan media meet at the Parliamentary Reporters' Handbook workshop in 2023.*

## Print

The two main newspapers are the privately owned Samoa Observer and the state-owned Savali Newspaper. There are also a range of newsletters from government and non-government organisations (NGOs), which are typically distributed electronically.

The Samoa Observer is published in English seven days a week. Due to the increasing cost of newsprint triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, daily print circulation has dropped from 5,000 to 3,000 for the Sunday edition and to 2,000 for the Monday–Saturday editions. The Samoa Observer is headquartered in Apia and has its own press. Since its establishment in 1978, it has garnered a reputation for “fighting for press freedom” and has resisted “threats, harassment and the torching of its headquarters, and thus enjoys a reputation that is admired by editors throughout the Pacific”.<sup>6</sup> Media practitioner respondents also highlighted its regional reputation for both professionalism and as a trusted source of news content because it is perceived to provide unbiased, accurate, and timely reporting.

The Savali, the government newspaper, was established in 1906, making it the oldest newspaper in the country. It has two editions, a weekly bilingual newspaper in English and Samoan, and a monthly Samoan-language gazette called the Savali Samoa. The bilingual edition, which has recently expanded online, focuses on coverage of government initiatives. Its weekly news stories are also shared on its Facebook page. Savali Samoa focuses on decisions from the Land and Titles Court and is accessible via the Savali office in Apia.<sup>7</sup> The Parliament of Samoa publishes a newsletter after each sitting, *Palemene o Samoa*, that summarises the proceedings.

<sup>6</sup> [Reporters Without Borders - Samoa](#), accessed September 5, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> [Government of Samoa - Savali Newspaper](#), accessed September 5, 2024.

Newsletters are also produced by the following ministries and NGOs:

- Office of the Ombudsman
- Samoa Qualifications Authority
- Samoa Law Reform Commission
- Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration
- Samoa Victim Support Group
- Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations (SUNGO)

Print media in Samoa is listed in appendix 1.

## Radio

Radio in Samoa comprises a state-owned radio station and more than a dozen commercial stations. The government, through the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), runs the station Radio 2AP. Radio 2AP was established in 1947 as the national broadcaster, and is referred to as the “Voice of the Nation”. It is the only AM station, transmitting via 540 AM. In 2019, following the installation of a digital-ready AM transmitter and two low-power transmitters, Radio 2AP was able to broadcast on FM for the first time.<sup>8</sup> Since July 2020, it has been accessible via the internet and through web and mobile apps like Zeno and GoLoud.<sup>9</sup> This allows online users worldwide to access its live content.<sup>10</sup>

As an emergency broadcaster, Radio 2AP is the source of information during natural disasters and other emergencies. It also delivers official government messages and is regarded as a platform that “promotes Samoan culture and traditions [and] delivers quality coverage across the nation through live broadcasts of national events”.<sup>11</sup> It also provides regional coverage to neighbouring Tokelau and American Samoa.

Of the commercial radio operators, Radio Polynesia Ltd is the largest, operating five FM stations since its establishment in 1989. Each has its own niche audience and provides different music genres. Talofa FM is noted by media practitioner respondents as the most popular, and the only station that produces 100 per cent Samoan content and a mix of island music.<sup>12</sup> The latest addition is Malo FM, which focuses on youth, local artists, and music from Pacific neighbours. Radio Polynesia’s coverage reaches most of Samoa, and these stations are also streamed online and thereby accessible worldwide. Besides music entertainment, Radio Polynesia’s website also provides free local news content.<sup>13</sup>

8 [\*ABC International Development - Samoa Radio's New Transmitter Broadcasts Critical Emergency Information\*, November 29, 2019, updated December 3, 2019.](#)

9 [\*Ministry of Communications and Information Technology - Samoa's Digital Journey PDF\*, accessed September 5, 2024.](#)

10 [\*Eirenei Ariu, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology - Radio 2AP Now Available on Web, Android and IOS\*, July 1, 2020.](#)

11 [\*Ministry of Communications and Information Technology - Broadcasting Services Division\*, accessed September 5, 2024.](#)

12 [\*Pacific Journalism Review - Samoa's Media Freedom Climate: 'Shining the Light\*.](#)

13 [\*Leilua Amesene, Radio Polynesia Samoa - Radio Polynesia Celebrates 33 Years of Service\*, September 29, 2022.](#)



Church denominations also operate radio broadcasts:

- The Samoa Worship Centre Christian Church in Apia owns and operates Showers of Blessing FM. It opened its headquarters in Apia in April 2022 during the COVID-19 lockdown to provide live broadcasting of church services. It also livestreams on its website. The church also has a radio station called Laufou ole Talalelei, managed by its Youth for Christ Ministry.<sup>14</sup>
- The Catholic Church runs Aiga Fesilafai Radio, which transmits via 90.5 FM.
- The Seventh-day Adventist Church runs HopeFM, available through 107 FM.

Details of radio broadcasters are listed in appendix 2.

## Television

There are currently nine digital TV channels in Samoa: TV1 from Samoa Quality Broadcasting, EFKS TV (TV2), TV3 from Apia Broadcasting Ltd, Upu Mana TV (TV4), Star TV (TV5), Kingdom TV (TV6), Hope TV (TV7), NUSTV (TV8) from the National University of Samoa, and the Government of Samoa's TV (TV9).

The government decided to revive its television channel in 2019, following the transition from analog to digital. This led to the inception of TV9. The digital channel mainly broadcasts parliamentary sessions, all of which are broadcast live. Like Radio 2AP, TV9 is a platform to disseminate information to the public about the government's development initiatives and policies.

Samoa Quality Broadcasting provides free-to-air broadcasts through TV1 and online, and streams major cultural and sports events as well as news and entertainment.

The Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa), the biggest church denomination in the country, runs EFKS TV.<sup>15</sup> This is "commercially operated under the guidance of the Missionary Committee (Komiti Faamisionare)" of the church.<sup>16</sup> There are several other church-run television stations, which cut across various denominations.

Samoa's pay-TV services consist of:

- Moana TV – formerly owned by Bluesky Samoa Ltd, now owned by Vodafone – a subscription IPTV service providing access to entertainment channels.
- Digicel TV and Sky Pacific – through which Digicel (Samoa) Ltd provides subscription satellite TV.<sup>17</sup>

Details of television broadcasters in Samoa are listed in appendix 3.

<sup>14</sup> Lepou, "Samoa's Media Freedom," 18.

<sup>15</sup> Lepou, "Samoa's media freedom," 18.

<sup>16</sup> [EFKS TV - You Tube channel](#), accessed September 5, 2024.

<sup>17</sup> [Office of the Regulator-List of Broadcasters PDF](#), accessed September 5, 2024.

## Online

Online news platforms in Samoa tend to cover a diverse range of news topics. Flagship publications like the Samoa Observer and Savali have established websites to complement their offline offerings. Other online news platforms include:

- Talamua Online News, which focuses on local news content covering business, court, health, community, and politics.
- Radio Samoa, an online news platform based in Apia and Auckland, that delivers its news content in Samoan for local and global audiences
- Newslane Samoa, which focuses mainly on local news and current affairs covering core topics such as politics, finance, crime, education, and health.
- Samoa Global News, which covers local, regional, and world news. Its local news content focuses on business, sports, the communities of Alii and Faipule,<sup>18</sup> and government notices.

Details of online news platforms in Samoa are listed in appendix 4.

## Government and civil society

The government and civil society communications sector includes government ministries, NGOs, and community-based organisations. In addition to the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), which governs the state's Broadcasting Services Division, the following ministries have dedicated media units:

- Ministry of Education and Culture
- Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development
- Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

Civil society bodies can become members of the Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations (SUNGO), which provides training, advocacy, information, and research support, supplementing the communications unit within each member organisation.<sup>19</sup> Civil society organisations such as the Samoa Cancer Society, the Samoa Conservation Society, and disability advocacy group Nuanua O Le Alofa have an online presence, most notably on Facebook.

## Target audience

Media practitioner respondents reported that news stories are for “every Samoan” and do not target a particular group. Respondents highlighted that it is more cost-effective and logistically efficient to produce general news programs that cover a range of topics and cater to various audience preferences than to develop targeted programming.

Audience feedback on news content is typically relayed through social media, according to media practitioner respondents – for example, through comments and posts on Facebook. Daily radio talk shows and talkback shows were also highlighted by media practitioner respondents as effective platforms to receive feedback from audiences and government ministries.

<sup>18</sup> Alii refers to the village council in the Samoan chiefly system. Faipule is the Samoan councilor who heads a political district.

<sup>19</sup> [Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations - website.](#)





Content maker Lars Bell performs a sound check.





## 4. MEDIA CONTENT COVERAGE

*Locally produced content features a mix of stories on hyperlocal issues affecting communities, and nationally and regionally focused news. As media practitioner respondents noted, a central value underpinning Samoan media production is its emphasis on capturing insights on local and regional news through the eyes of the “everyday Samoan”. This includes local perspectives on core news topics such as climate change, lifestyle diseases, and domestic violence.*



*In the studio of Talofa FM. (Facebook)*

Media practitioner respondents noted a growing audience demand for content featuring stories on national developments: “Everyone wants to see what has been going on, what has been implemented, success stories, failure, and challenges of projects” (Samoa 03). Respondents suggested these stories encourage public participation and emotional investment in national initiatives geared towards ensuring Samoa’s continued progress.

Contextualising all forms of reporting was fa’asamoa (culture),<sup>20</sup> which journalists are expected to adhere to in their professional roles. This includes showing “respect for elders, respect for leaders, and respect for the community” (Samoa 03).

Samoa prides itself on showcasing its traditional storytelling in media content. For example, Samoa GEM has produced the first ever local children’s TV series, Pacific Storytime and Play (also accessible via an app). This features traditional stories developed through collaborations with artists, content creators, elders, educators, parents, and caregivers. Storytime and Play is funded in Samoa by Plan International Australia, with support from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.<sup>21</sup>

Samoa media practitioners recognise the critical role they play in disaster

<sup>20</sup> “Fa’asamoa – Samoan culture. The concept of fa’asamoa is essential to Samoan identity, and consists of a number of values and traditions: aiga (family), tautala Samoa (Samoan language), gafa (genealogies), matai (chiefly system), lotu (church), fa’alavelave (ceremonial and other family obligations).” Te Ara, [The Encyclopedia of New Zealand - Samoans Culture and Identity](#), accessed September 5, 2024.

<sup>21</sup> [Samoa Storytime and Play - website.](#)

preparedness and emergency broadcasting. Radio 2AP is the official emergency broadcaster and has a good relationship with the Samoa Meteorological Division. Respondents reported that they paid a personal toll in reporting on disasters, citing the work as confronting, emotionally intense, and exhausting. The 2009 tsunami which led to the deaths of 149 people has had a long-lasting impact on some media practitioners. Respondents explained that they were still affected by the disaster which upended reporters own lives and led to the deaths of 149 people, some of whom were friends and family.

Most foreign news content consumed by Samoan audiences is produced and broadcast, televised, or uploaded from New Zealand and Australia. ABC Radio Australia, for instance, is freely accessible on 102 FM, providing a variety of Pacific focussed news, sport and other content. The China Global Television Network (CGTN) and its Chinese International Radio are also relayed across Samoa. Samoans have a variety of choices via free channels, pay-per-view TV, subscription satellite TV, or online radio and news content, such that they can access news from anywhere around the world.

## Gender equality, disability and social inclusion

The stakeholder interviews with media practitioners aimed to capture top-level themes including gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) representation in media content coverage in Samoa. The findings below should not be viewed as exhaustive due to a small sample size. Rather, these insights provide an indication of potential trends in media practitioner perceptions of GEDSI issues.

Media practitioner respondents reported that GEDSI issues form part of news content or stories covered by media outlets. This includes stories on domestic violence, poverty, and impacts on vulnerable groups such as women, young girls and children (Samoa 02).

Significant barriers exist for people with disabilities in accessing content and seeing themselves represented in the media in Samoa.<sup>22</sup> One of the primary hurdles identified for inclusive media is the need for more consistent accessibility measures in media workplaces that would enable people with disabilities to participate as media workers.

One content initiative discussed by a respondent relates to a project currently in development by the government's broadcasting division (2AP and TV9), focused on social and disability inclusion and gender equality in relation to climate change. The Samoan-language project will also revive traditional knowledge about climate change and weather forecasts in partnership with the Office of Meteorology (Samoa 04).

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<sup>22</sup> [ABC International Development - Disability Inclusion in the Media Study, 2023.](#)





*Samoa's media calls on the expertise of disability rights advocate Mata'afa Fa'atino Utumapu.*

# 05

## 5. MEDIA BUSINESS RESILIENCE

*Government and private media coexist – with each organisation surviving through different revenue stream combinations – but their financial foothold was noted by Reporters Without Borders as fragile.<sup>23</sup> In particular, private media organisations face financial challenges in sustaining their work.*

Small media outlets like us always need financial assistance, equipment, and need to update our computers according to the way technology is going. We're aware of our independence and happy to team up with like-minded businesses who see things the way we see how news and information should be arranged, uploaded, and broadcast to the public. (Samoa 02)

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<sup>23</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Samoa."



Senior reporter Mauisiisii Leutu Mose conducts an interview in the 2AP studio.

Private media outlets play an important role in keeping the public aware of issues, while simultaneously striving to keep up with audiences online. Media practitioner respondents highlighted the challenge of staying up to date with new media technology and the information environment. They see a need for specialised media training to optimise the use of technology to produce news content.

Training is also seen as key to building business resilience. Trainings suggested by respondents comprised fundamental craft skills for journalism – such as writing online news content or stories – and on technology, including AI tools. This is seen as particularly necessary for small media outlets that need to streamline editorial workflows, especially with limited staffing.

Exploring possibilities for monetising online content (e.g. paywalling) is also viewed as a natural “next step” for organisations that have a digital presence but lack the framework and infrastructure to develop these systems. An example of media’s successful embrace of digital platforms and online monetisation is the Samoa Observer. In 2019, the Observer transformed its newsroom publishing process using an online publishing system. The system has improved the speed of publishing, streamlining the news workflow. The digital transformation also includes a paywall system to generate revenue from premium content.<sup>24</sup> However, media practitioner respondents from smaller organisations noted that financial support is required to equip media with the necessary technology to build online monetisation systems.

## Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI), though used infrequently and cautiously by the media, is seen by media practitioner respondents as a useful tool to ease the process of gathering, producing, and presenting news content. A respondent whose media outlet experimented with using AI said:

It helps when you want to quickly select photographs that relate to a particular story. It eases the work and gives you a very rapid turnover of the kinds of things that you’re looking for, especially the repetitive ones. On the other hand, the downside of using AI is that it does not do justice when it comes to pronouncing Samoan names, so journalists consciously do not want to use it. (Samoa 02)

More than half of the respondents have tried using AI in their work but do not use it regularly, in part due to its incompatibility with the Samoan language.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander Rheeny, [Samoa Observer - Online Publishing System](#)  
[Heralds Next Chapter for Samoa Observer](#), March 9, 2019.





## 6. MEDIA POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

### Print

*The Newspapers and Printers Act 1993 and Defamation Act 1993 are the two main laws regulating print media. The Newspaper and Printers Act requires registration of newspaper businesses and makes it an offence to print, publish, sell, or distribute an unregistered newspaper. The defamation act allows a person to initiate a civil defamation claim against a newspaper for published material that is deemed defamatory in nature.*



Members of Samoa's media interview Speaker of the House, Papali'i Li'o Ta'eu Masipa.

## Broadcast media

The Broadcasting Act 2010 establishes the broadcasting regulator. Its mandate includes regulating access to broadcast facilities and services; issuing and revoking licences; and approving programs and advertising standards for broadcast. Any person wanting to provide a broadcasting service to the public, or wanting to own or operate a broadcasting facility, is required to pay a licence fee under the act.<sup>25</sup>

## Telecommunications

The telecommunications sector is regulated by the Telecommunications Act 2005. The act prohibits the commercial provision of telecommunications services and networks to the public without a licence. Service providers who “use the radio spectrum to provide telecommunications services require both a radio spectrum licence and a telecommunications licence” to operate.<sup>26</sup>

## Other laws

The current legislative framework makes it compulsory to broadcast and livestream parliamentary meetings through Radio 2AP, TV9, and the Palemene Samoa Facebook page and YouTube channel. The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly has discretionary powers over which members of the media may cover parliament meetings, and may disallow journalists if they deem the outlet's reporting to be inaccurate or unfair. The parliament has a media policy and launched a media handbook in conjunction with JAWS in 2023, as a guide for the press on parliamentary procedures and media access.<sup>27</sup>

The Crimes Act 2013 provides for criminal libel, making it an offence to publish false statements causing harm to a person's reputation. Criminal libel was removed from Samoa's criminal law later in 2013 as a media reform initiative, but then revived in 2017 by the Human Rights Protection Party government.<sup>28</sup> The revival sparked reactions from the media for lack of consultation with stakeholders and concerns about the implications for freedom of expression and the work of the media, such as journalists risking jail time and criminal fines.

Samoaan policies and legislation governing the media sector are listed in appendix 5.

<sup>25</sup> [Samoa Consolidated Legislation - Broadcasting Act 2010.](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Office of the Regulator - Telecommunications](#), accessed September 5, 2024.

<sup>27</sup> [Parliament of Samoa - Media Policy.](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Civics Monitor - Defamation Laws Being Used to Silence Criticism in Samoa](#), September 27, 2019.



## Freedom of expression

In the 2024 World Press Freedom Index, Samoa is ranked 22nd of 180 countries and territories, a fall from 19th place in 2023. According to media practitioner respondents, media freedom in Samoa is respected but there is scope for improvement.

In 2017, criminal defamation was revived as part of an “effort to address the growing number of ‘ghost writers’ using fake social media pages to attack public servants and individuals”.<sup>29</sup> In 2018, the Samoa Observer reported that there were institutional attempts to ban social media in Samoa, making reference to anonymous bloggers using social media “to abuse Government officials and innocent members of the public”.<sup>30</sup>

Freedom of speech and expression are expressly provided for and protected under the constitution.<sup>31</sup> However, it does not make explicit provision for the freedom of the press or the media. Freedom of speech and expression in the constitution are regulated by laws relating to defamation, national security, confidential information, and protection of privileges of the Legislative Assembly.

## Accessing official information

Samoa does not, at the time of writing, have a law providing for the right to access information. Media practitioner respondents noted that accessing information remains a prominent challenge for reporters in Samoa, an observation reiterated by the Media Council.<sup>32</sup> The challenge in accessing official government information was particularly prominent during the measles epidemic in 2019 and COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–21.<sup>33</sup>

In December 2019, the Samoa Knowledge Society Initiative was conceived to support the development of legislation on the right to information in Samoa. According to the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, the initiative, developed by the Government of Samoa, UNDP and UNESCO supported MCIT to develop a Freedom to Access Information Policy, and RTI Legislation.<sup>34</sup> According to media practitioner respondents, MCIT drafted the Information Access Policy 2023, following consultations with media and other stakeholders, and it is near completion at the time of writing.

In January 2024, the University of the South Pacific (USP) launched the ‘Beginning of Right to Information initiative’ at the USP Alafua campus in Samoa. The launch was described as marking an important milestone in “strengthening the foundations of the RTI movement in Samoa, a move that aligns with global standards of open governance”.<sup>35</sup>

29 [Talane.com - Samoa Police Thinking of Decriminalising Libel Defamation](#), February 16, 2023.

30 Joyetter Luamanu, [Samoa Observer - P.M. Threatens to Ban Facebook](#), March 31, 2018.

31 *Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa*, par. II, art. XIII.

32 [Radio New Zealand - Free Press Essential to Democracy Says Pacific Media Watchdog](#), May 3, 2022.

33 [Reporters Without Borders](#), “Samoa.”

34 [United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation - Expanding Access to Information and Digital Transformation in Samoa](#), February 22, 2023.

35 [The University of the South Pacific - Beginning of Right to Information Initiative in Samoa](#), January 26, 2024.



*Talamua Online News reporter and JAWS President, Lagi Keresoma, at a public meeting.*

## Media industry bodies and self-regulation

The Media Council and JAWS represent a self-regulatory mechanism in the media sector. The council was established in 2017 as part of the Media Council Act 2015, and under the act, the council is responsible for developing, applying, and enforcing the Media Code of Practice, which applies “to all members of the media”.<sup>36</sup> The Media Council provides a means to address public complaints about the media or breaches of the Code of Practice. Self-regulation by media is emphasised strongly in the Code of Practice, but it occasionally acts “as a tribunal of last resort” to deal with complaints regarding breaches by the media of the Code of Practice, imposing relevant penalties where required.<sup>37</sup>

However, according to media practitioner respondents, the Media Council is currently inactive due to a lack of financial support for its operations. Respondents noted that, in 2021, before the council became inactive, there were fewer than 10 complaints that surfaced, alleging bias in reporting. These complaints were either resolved between the media concerned and complainants, or were not pursued further. This means that no complaint has been officially investigated by the Media Council since its establishment. Media practitioner respondents noted that, with the council inactive, people resort to the courts to resolve issues with the media (Samoa 04).

<sup>36</sup> [\*Samoa Consolidated Legislation - Samoa Media Council Act 2015.\*](#)

<sup>37</sup> [\*Media Council of Samoa, Journalists Association of Samoa - Media Code of Practice Samoa, 4 February 2017.\*](#)



# 07

## 7. MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

*All media practitioner respondents noted that mis/disinformation pose significant challenges for their work, as there is no clear law on these as yet. Further, respondents noted that a lack of fact-checking has at times contributed to the issue, as have instances of editorial oversight.*

Media practitioner respondents also highlighted that the rise of social media and evolving digital connectivity makes it easier for members of the public to publish and disseminate information. This places the onus on local media to counter misinformation – which is proving a key challenge. Respondents also noted that authorities face similar challenges, especially when misinformed narratives create social panic and unrest.



Reporters practice doorstep interview skills at a workshop.

The incidence of mis/disinformation in Samoa became particularly heightened during the country's 2019 measles epidemic and leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>38</sup> Anti-vaccination sentiment shared online and in-person impacted measles vaccination rates.<sup>39</sup> The influence of social media has been explored in a number of studies, which have shown it to be a vehicle for misinformation and anti-vaccination campaigns.<sup>40</sup>

The 2021 elections saw the first ever female prime minister, Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, elected into office. The political situation involved the former prime minister Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegao not stepping down and handing over power. The weeks of controversy created significant debate and discussion on social media, which at times generated mis/disinformation.<sup>41</sup> During the elections, Facebook, in conjunction with the Samoan electoral commission, instituted a "social media blackout" and blocked content that was understood to be in breach of local laws.<sup>42</sup> Local media played a critical role in keeping the public informed of the facts of the situation as it evolved.

38 Caitlin Vaelenoatia Paese Sefo, [Caitlin Vaelenoatia Paese Sefo - The Influence of Misinformation on the Health-Related Decision Making of the Samoan People During the Measles Epidemic](#).

39 Vaelenoatia Paese Sefo, "Influence Misinformation", 3.

40 Val Hooper, "Misinformation in the 2019 Samoan Measles Epidemic: The Role of the Influencer," in *Proceedings of the 7th European Conference on Social Media*, ed. Christos Karpasitis and Christiana Varda (Academic Conferences and Publishing International Ltd, 2020), 112–118; Vaelenoatia Paese Sefo, "Influence Misinformation.", 10.

41 [Samoa Observer - Regulation No Match for Online Misinformation](#), March 1, 2021.

42 Elinorah Malifa, [Pacific Wayfinder Podcast - Social Media Security](#), July 26, 2022.





## 8. MEDIA INFRASTRUCTURE

### Telecommunications

*The launch of the Tui-Samoa submarine cable in February 2018 and the government's Manatua cable in November 2019 has resulted in one of the highest rates of mobile phone coverage in the Pacific Islands region, with 97 per cent of the nation covered.<sup>43</sup> At the start of the Tui-Samoa project, the Samoa Submarine Cable Company was established and registered as a private company to “build, manage and operate the Tui-Samoa submarine cable between Apia, Samoa, and Suva, Fiji, on behalf of the Government of Samoa”.<sup>44</sup>*

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<sup>43</sup> Adel Fruean, [Samoa Observer - Mobile Coverage Reaches 97 Per Cent](#), March 27, 2021.

<sup>44</sup> [Samoa Submarine Cable Company - About Us](#), accessed September 5, 2024.



*The site of Radio 2AP's new transmission mast, erected in 2019.*

In August 2020, Samoa completed its switch to digital TV transmission. Digital TV now covers 99 per cent of the population and is providing higher sound and image quality, as well as interactive services.<sup>45</sup>

Since October 2022, there have been six internet service providers operating in the local market: Digicel, Vodafone, Computer Services Ltd, Bluewave Wireless, Samoa Digital Communications Ltd, and Lesa's Telephone Services.

The Digital Samoa Project, an initiative financed by the World Bank and implemented by the MCIT and Office of the Regulator (OoTR), aims to “support the development of climate and disaster-resilient national digital connectivity infrastructure”.<sup>46</sup> The project was expected to start in late 2024, however, at the time of publication, it had not commenced. It includes a rollout of broadband and enhancements to the Radio 2AP broadcast system. The project will also “support capacity building for MCIT and OoTR and strengthen the enabling environment for digital government and digital economy of Samoa”.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> [Office of the Regulator - Information and Communication Technology Sector Plan 2022/2023 PDF.](#)

<sup>46</sup> [Office of the Regulator - Digital Samoa Project PDF](#), accessed September 5, 2024.

<sup>47</sup> [Office of the Regulator, Digital Samoa Project, 1.](#)



Further, the Samoan Cabinet granted approval for SpaceX's Starlink satellite services to begin operating in March 2024,<sup>48</sup> however, in August of the same year Starlink notified customers that it would cease operating due to "regulatory hurdles".<sup>49</sup> The regulator granted approval for Starlink to operate in Samoa in January 2025.<sup>50</sup>

## Broadcast transmission

In 2019, the only state-owned radio station, Radio 2AP, was fitted with a new transmission mast, which expanded reach across the country.<sup>51</sup> The station is the key media outlet that sources and shares information on natural disasters, and it was instrumental in broadcasting information during the measles outbreak in 2019. The new digital-ready AM transmitter was installed in addition to two low-power transmitters, allowing Radio 2AP to broadcast on FM for the first time. This enabled Samoans to access Radio 2AP via their mobile phones and vehicles fitted with FM radios.<sup>52</sup>

Terrestrial analog TV broadcasts, which had been available in Samoa since 1993, ceased on August 31, 2020. The switch to digital TV transmission was intended to "spur future economic, social and educational development in the country".<sup>53</sup> This was a key development in the broadcasting landscape of Samoa, as it provided a digital platform for TV broadcasters, service providers, media, and the public to access high-quality television signals. The public can access digital TV by purchasing a set-top box from designated stores.<sup>54</sup> Samoa Digital Communications Ltd owns and operates the digital television platform.<sup>55</sup>

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48 [\*Australia-Pacific Business Connections - Starlink Approved in Samoa But Import of Kits Halted\*](#), April 14, 2024.

49 [\*Samoa Observer - How do we solve the Starlink Problem?\*](#), August 17, 2024.

50 [\*Samoa Observer - Cabinet Endorses Starlink\*](#), 11 January, 2025.

51 [\*ABC International Development - Samoa Radio's New Transmitter Broadcasts Critical Emergency Information\*](#), November 28, 2019.

52 ABCID, "Samoa Radio's New Transmitter Broadcasts Critical Emergency Information".

53 Eirenei Ariu, [\*Government of Samoa - Official Switch-Off of Analogue TV in Samoa\*](#), August 28, 2020.

54 Soli Wilson, [\*Samoa Observer - Digital TV Coverage Reaches 99 Per Cent Coverage\*](#), August 1, 2020.

55 [\*Radio New Zealand - Samoa Switches Off Analogue TV Broadcasts\*](#), August 31, 2020.



TV1 crew rig for an Outside Broadcast.

# 09

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

*The following recommendations on strengthening the Samoan media sector are informed by data both from interviews with media practitioners and from a desk review of existing literature.*

### **Strengthening media industry bodies will support Samoan media growth**

A strong media sector is in part driven by the ability of media to self-regulate through representative industry bodies. In the Samoan context, this pivotal function is predicated on the combined effectiveness of JAWS and the Media Council. Media practitioner respondents noted that both JAWS and the Media Council lack the required financial support to remain operationally viable. Strategic funding should be considered, to support operational areas including the council's administration of the public complaints process. Further, greater public and sector-wide understanding of the role that media industry bodies play is vital to ensure that bodies such as JAWS have broader support in advocating for the work they do.





*Headquarters of 2AP and TV9 in Apia.*

## Skilled media central to setting quality benchmarks

The media should be strengthened so that it can set the standard for quality journalism in Samoa. The advent of social media has seen a proliferation of online platforms that are used to spread mis/disinformation. Having a high standard of journalism can assist in countering this spread of misinformation. This requires training and upskilling of journalists, especially young graduates, in core skills such as interviewing.

## Harnessing digital tools for greater efficiency

Media practitioner respondents noted that as Samoa's media sector embraces digitisation, including the use of AI, journalists also need upskilling so they can use new technologies to perform tasks more efficiently. It was widely noted among respondents that the impact of this would be most notable for smaller media organisations with limited staff who embrace new information and communications technology as part of their workflows. This would allow more integration of up-to-date tools into the process of delivering news and information to audiences.

The shift to digital broadcasting and increased availability of internet access has required media organisations in Samoa to consider online content monetisation options to remain financially viable and ensure that knowledge gaps around technology and online journalism in the sector are addressed.

## CONCLUSION

The findings in this report highlight the struggles of print media in Samoa, which are experiencing a declining audience share yet remain the benchmark for “best-practice” journalism. Media also experience significant challenges associated with the digitalisation of the sector, including struggles to monetise digital content, misinformation and disinformation, and a general lack of experience using digital technology. Finally, while Samoan media have been challenged by restrictions to freedom of speech and a lack of legislated right to information, JAWS and the Media Council can play a critical role in encouraging self-regulation and adherence to high journalistic standards.





*Mauisiisii Leutu Mose working in the field for 2AP.*

# APPENDIX 1. PRINT MEDIA

| Platform   | Organisation  | Ownership/<br>Funding | Language           | Website/Social media   | Sector     |
|------------|---|-----------------------|--------------------|--|------------|
| Newspaper  | Samoa Observer  | Private               | English/<br>Samoan | <a href="#">Samoa Observer - website</a><br>Facebook, LinkedIn, X  | Commercial |
|            | Savali  | State                 | English/<br>Samoan | <a href="#">Savali News - website</a><br><a href="#">Savali Newspaper, Government website</a><br>Facebook, X | Government |
| Newsletter | Office of the Ombudsman                                   | State                 | English            | <a href="#">Office of the Ombudsman - Newsletter</a><br>Facebook, X, YouTube                                 | Government |
|            | Parliament of Samoa                                       | State                 | Samoan             | <a href="#">Parliament of Samoa - website</a>  | Government |
|            | Samoa Qualifications Authority                            | State                 | English            | <a href="#">Samoa Qualifications Authority - website</a><br>Facebook, Instagram, YouTube                     | Government |
|            | Samoa Law Reform Commission                               | State                 | English            | <a href="#">Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration - website</a><br>Facebook, YouTube                 | Government |
|            | Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration             | State                 | English            | <a href="#">Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration - website</a>                                      | Government |
|            | Samoa Victim Support Group                                | State/<br>Donors      | English            | <a href="#">Samoa Victim Support Group - website</a><br>Facebook, Instagram                                  | Community  |
|            | Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations (SUNGO) | Donors                | English            | <a href="#">Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations - website</a><br>Facebook                      | Community  |



# APPENDIX 2. RADIO

| Organisation  | Ownership/<br>Funding | Language  | Website/Social media  | Sector     |
|---|-----------------------|---|---|------------|
| Radio 2AP (AM)  | State                 | Samoan  | <a href="#"><i>Ministry of Communication and Information Technology and Office of the Regulator - Radio 2AP</i></a><br>Facebook | Government |
| Talofa 88.5, 99.9, 91.5 FM<br>K-Lite 101.1 FM<br>Magic 98.1, 89.5 FM<br>Star 96.1 FM<br>Malo 105.3 FM (Radio Polynesia Ltd) | Private               | Samoan<br>(Talofa, Star and Malo)<br>English (K-Lite and Magic) | <a href="#"><i>Radio Polynesia Samoa - website</i></a><br>Facebook  | Commercial |
| 89.1My FM (TV1 Samoa)   | Private               | English   | N/A   | Commercial |
| Chinese International Radio 100.4 FM  | State                 | Chinese   | N/A   | Government |
| ABC Radio Australia 102 FM  | State                 | English   | <a href="#"><i>ABC Radio Australia, Pacific - website</i></a>   | Government |
| Aiga Fesilafai Radio 90.5 FM (Catholic Church)  | Church                | Samoan/<br>English  | <a href="#"><i>AigaFesilafai FM - live stream</i></a>   | Church     |
| Showers of Blessing 89.9 FM (Samoa Worship Centre Christian Church)   | Church                | Samoan/<br>English  | <a href="#"><i>Showers of Blessing Radio - website</i></a><br>Facebook  | Church     |
| Power 106.7 FM  | Private               | Samoan  | <a href="#"><i>Power 106.7 FM - website</i></a>   | Commercial |
| Samoa FM Radio 93.7, 104.1 FM (Talamua Media)   | Private               | English   | N/A   | Commercial |
| Hope 107 FM (Seventh-day Adventist Church)  | Church                | Samoan  | Facebook  | Church     |
| Laufou O Le Talalelei 95.1, 103.1 FM (Samoa Worship Centre Christian Church)  | Church                | English/<br>Samoan  | <a href="#"><i>Laufou O Le Talalelei - website</i></a><br>Facebook  | Church     |
| Salafai FM  | Community-run         | Samoan  | N/A   | Community  |
| NUS Radio (National University of Samoa)  | Community-run         | English/<br>Samoan  | <a href="#"><i>National University of Samoa Radio - live stream</i></a>   | Community  |
| 685 Radio   | Private               | Samoan  | <a href="#"><i>685 Radio - live stream</i></a>  | Commercial |

# APPENDIX 3. TELEVISION

| Organisation  | Ownership/<br>Funding | Language       | Website/Social media                                  | Sector     |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|---|------------|
| TV 9  | State                 | English/Samoan | N/A   | Government |
| TV1 (also relays CGTN TV)   | Private               | English        | <a href="#">TV1 - website</a>                         | Commercial |
| TV 3 (Apia Broadcasting Ltd)  | Private               | Samoan/English | <a href="#">TV3 - website</a>                         | Commercial |
| Upu Mana TV   | Church                | Samoan/English | Facebook  | Church     |
| EFKS TV (Congregational Christian Church of Samoa – Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa) | Church                | Samoan/English | Facebook, YouTube                                     | Church     |
| TV5 (Star TV)   | Church                | Samoan/English | Facebook  | Church     |
| Kingdom TV (KTV)  | Church                | Samoan/English | <a href="#">Kingdom TV - website</a>                  | Church     |
| Moana TV  | Private               | Samoan/English | <a href="#">Moana TV</a>                              | Commercial |
| Digicel and Sky Pacific   | Private               | English        | <a href="#">Digicel Pacific - website</a>             | Commercial |
| TV 7 (Hope TV)  | Church                | English        | N/A   | Church     |
| BYU (Brigham Young University)  | Church                | English        | <a href="#">Brigham Young University TV - website</a> | Church     |
| NUSTV (National University of Samoa)  | Community-run         | English/Samoan | N/A   | Community  |

# APPENDIX 4.

## ONLINE MEDIA

| Organisation        | Ownership/<br>Funding | Language           | Website/Social media                                    | Sector     |
|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---|------------|
| Samoa Observer      | Private               | English            | <a href="#">Samoa Observer - website</a><br>Facebook    | Commercial |
| Savali              | State                 | English/<br>Samoan | <a href="#">Savali News - website</a><br>Facebook       | Government |
| Radio Samoa         | Private               | Samoan             | <a href="#">Radio Samoa - website</a><br>Facebook       | Commercial |
| Talamua Online News | Private               | English            | <a href="#">Talamua news - website</a><br>Facebook      | Commercial |
| Newsline Samoa      | Private               | English            | <a href="#">Newsline Samoa - website</a><br>Facebook    | Commercial |
| Samoa Global News   | Private               | English            | <a href="#">Samoa Global News - website</a><br>Facebook | Commercial |



# APPENDIX 5. POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

| Platform            | Policy  | Legislation  |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Print               | Samoa Media Code of Practice 2017   | Newspapers and Printers Act 1993<br>Defamation Act 1993<br>Other laws relating to defamation:<br>Crimes Act 2013<br>Electoral Act 2019<br>Tourism Development Act 2012 |
| Radio               | Samoa Media Code of Practice 2017   | Broadcasting Act 2010<br>Broadcasting (Licence Fees) Regulation 2015<br>Radio Spectrum Fees Amendment Regulations 2015   |
| Television          | N/A   | Broadcasting Act 2010  |
| Online/Social media | Samoa National Cybersecurity Strategy 2016–2021<br>Social Media Policy for Government 2017<br>Government Internet and Electronic Mail Policy 2016 | Crimes Act 2013  |
| Media organisations | Samoa Media Code of Practice 2017<br>Informed Samoa Policy 2021   | Media Council Act 2015   |
| Telecommunications  | N/A   | Telecommunications Act 2005  |