THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC RELATIONSHIP WITH SCIENCE SURVEY

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND ENGAGEMENT WITH SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

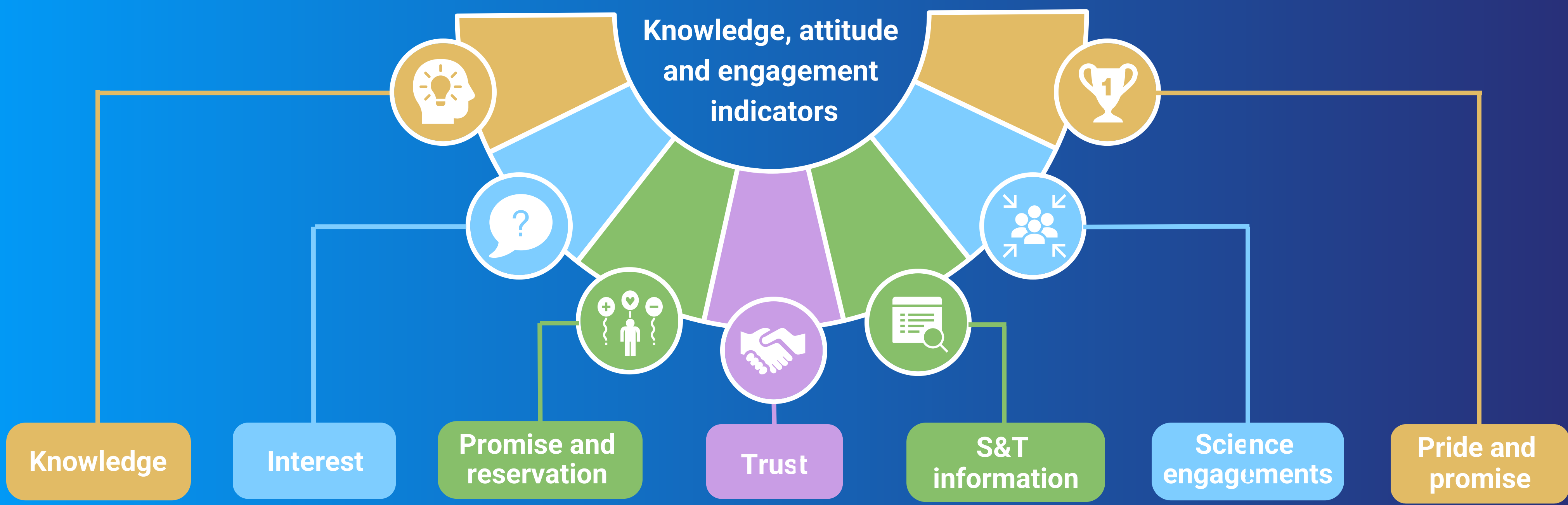
BACKGROUND

Science and technology (S&T) significantly shape our daily lives and experiences. The 2022 South African Public Relationship with Science (SAPRS) Survey was the first dedicated national survey which sought to understand South Africans' knowledge, attitudes and engagement behaviours in relation to S&T across all nine provinces.

METHODOLOGY

The SAPRS was explored using the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), a nationally representative survey that uses a sample of individuals aged 16 and older living in private households. Data collection took place via face-to-face interviews from November 2022 to January 2023. The national sample consisted of 5 960 participants.

SAPRS FRAMEWORK



KEY FINDINGS

- South Africans had more knowledge about areas related to their everyday experiences, such as education, water supply, food security, and electricity.
- The public were generally interested in S&T, despite differences in socio-demographic backgrounds.
- They recognised both the benefits of modern S&T, as well as acknowledging the risks they pose. There was some support for traditional S&T, with mixed views among the public.
- There was relatively high trust in scientists' work, and universities and research organisations.
- Television and radio were the most common, and most trusted sources of S&T information, with online sources becoming more popular.
- Overall engagement was low (academic exposure, attraction-based, community-based, S&T information sharing, and use of online apps).
- Socio-demographic characteristics played an important role, following a general pattern of those who were younger, more educated, from higher socio-economic status, with more home educational support, employed and living in urban areas having more knowledge, more positive attitudes and greater engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen the bi-directional and dialogical nature of the relationship between science and society.
- Improve science knowledge, promoting awareness through multiple platforms, highlighting S&T as part of everyday life.
- Expand the scale and reach of present programmes to instil a culture of curiosity and inquiry in society - interest is more amenable to interventions.
- Support early exposure to, and consumption of, S&T information, and attendance at events that inculcate an appreciation for S&T; as well as intergenerational curiosity and knowledge building.
- Promote a cultural system that values, celebrates and promotes S&T; and showcases evidence-based decision-making processes, debates, critique and contestation of ideas.
- Promote inclusion through initiatives such as zero rating of S&T educational sites, and the creation of content that is relevant to different life experiences.
- Communicate S&T information in easily understandable ways on television and radio, and encourage awareness of the rich information that can be found on the internet.
- Support campaigns to promote information, interest and knowledge, combined with efforts to promote greater access to S&T sites and events.

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