

Bridging the Divide: Science Engagement and Inequality in South Africa

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science, technology
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Science Engagement in South Africa

Substantial government investments to cultivate a scientifically literate society, yet participation remains uneven



Inequality is the primary filter through which science is consumed

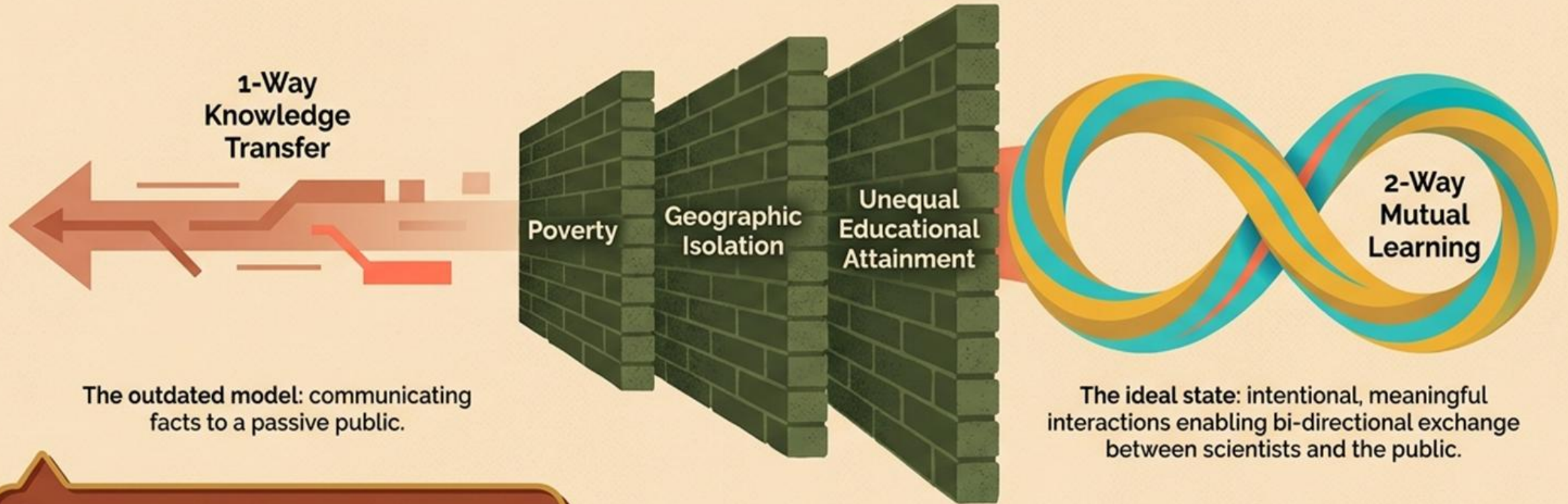


Mapping socio-economic and geographic disparities that shape access, trust and participation



Re-imagining Engagement

Deficit vs. Dialogue



Contemporary literature demands we recognise engagement as a distinctly social process, highly vulnerable to systemic societal fractures.

2022 SAPRS Survey

5 960

Respondents

Adults aged 16+

Coverage

National

Stratified probability sample
9 Provinces
All Demographics

Method

CAPI

Face-to-face interviews

Mandate

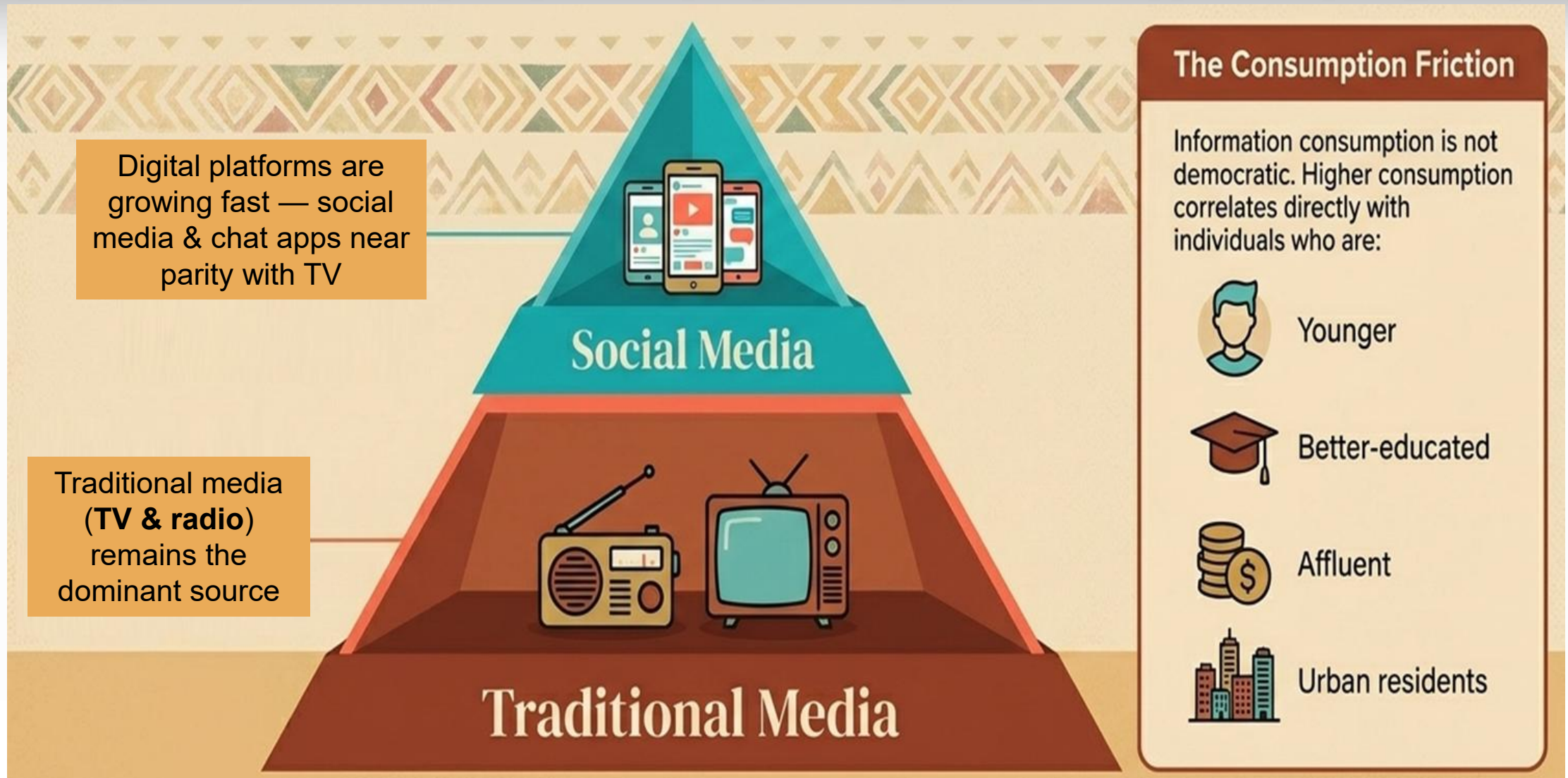
National Policy

White Paper on STI

Why This Survey Matters

- Institutionalised through the White Paper on STI (2019) as a national policy monitoring instrument
- Tracks knowledge, attitudes and engagement over time to inform government interventions and resource allocation
- Embedded in the HSRC's SASAS — a trusted, longitudinal national dataset

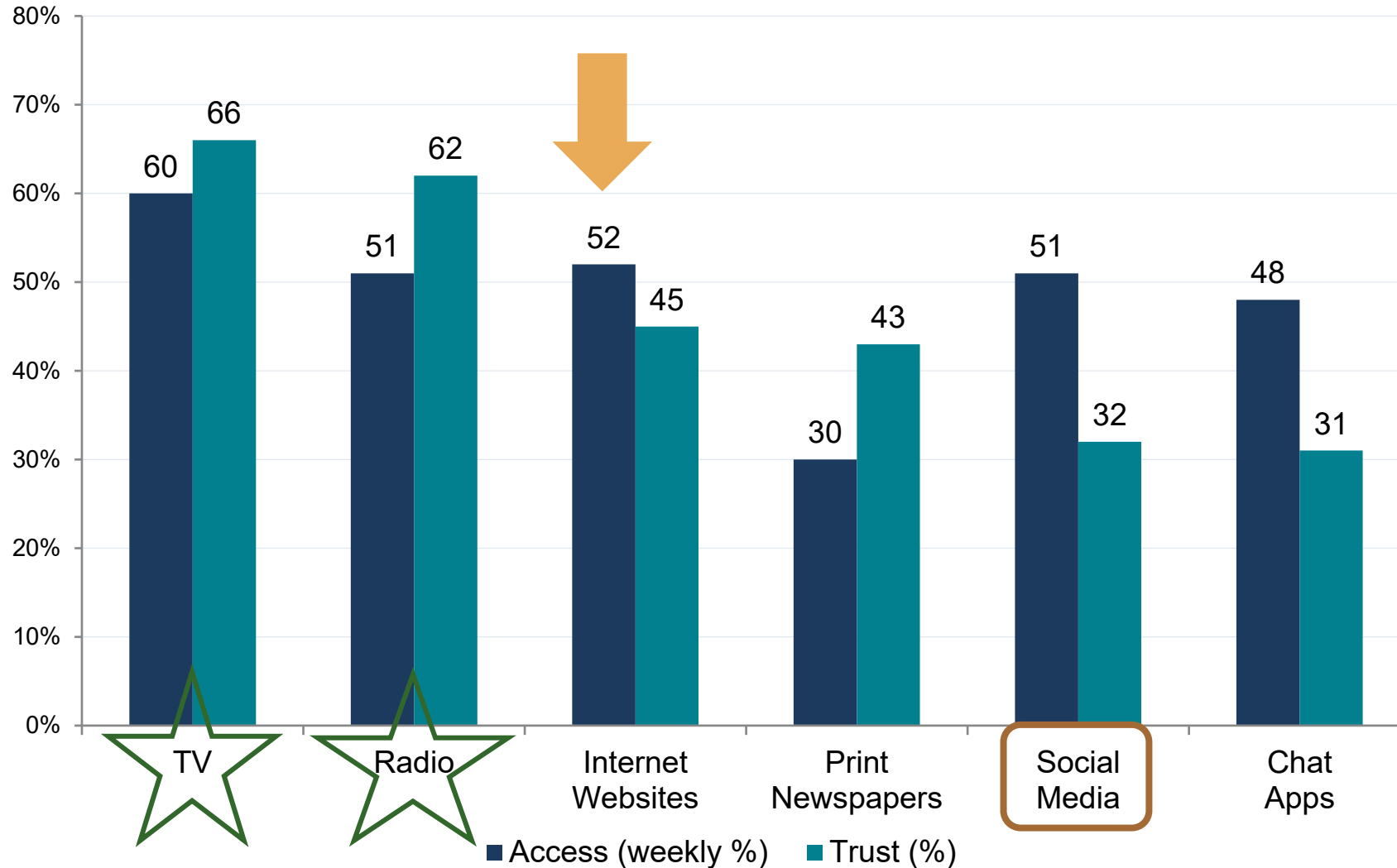
Accessing S&T Information



The digital divide is a science engagement divide

Consumption and Trust

Frequency vs trust by channel



TV & Radio

High use AND high trust
twin pillars of credibility

Social Media

HIGH use but LOW trust
(51% vs 32%)

Websites

Higher trust → leverage as priority channel

Opportunity: Data-free science
websites could bridge access & trust

Trust levels remains uniform across
sociodemographic groups

Participation & Engagement Patterns

55%



Public libraries are the primary and most accessible S&T spaces

Specialised venues remain practically inaccessible

< 15%



53% of South Africans express interest in attending S&T activities, but **INEQUALITIES** determine participation

Interest Exists - Barriers Don't - We must meet people where they already are

Relevance Shapes Engagement



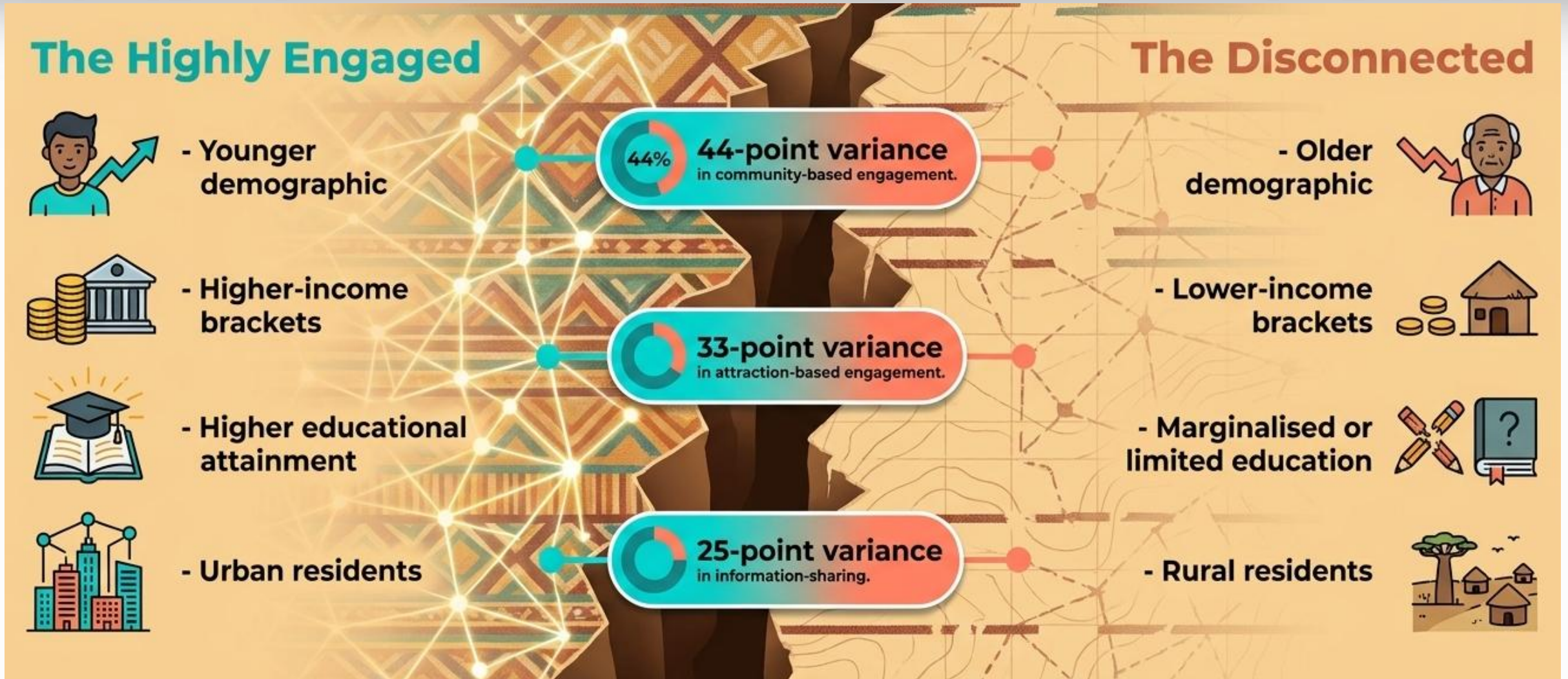
HOW S&T IS SHARED

Family & friends	62%
Online chat apps	43%
Social media	42%
Religious networks	31%
Community meetings	30%

% sharing at least sometimes

Engagement is higher for activities with immediate and tangible community benefits

Engagement Divide



Across every metric, science engagement is determined by socio-economic privilege, rather than being a universal right.

5 pillar Framework for Inclusive Science Engagement

01 Trustworthy Communication

Multilingual, culturally sensitive strategies across traditional & digital platforms

02 Enhanced Science Visibility

Centralised information portals, event calendars, and improved public promotion

03 Expand SciCom Access

Address financial, geographic & digital barriers through low-cost and mobile initiatives

04 Community Capacity Building

Participatory initiatives that build local trust, ownership, and inclusive development

05 Lifelong Learning

Integrate informal science opportunities into adult education and community programs

Science engagement is not a privilege — it is a universal public good.

Thank You!

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