



# The Future is Local

An Amárach Report

October 2020



## FOREWORD

2020 is the year that we have all had to face up to stark new realities.

In the communications industry, everything we thought we knew about media – from patterns of consumer behaviour to planning and buying policies – can now be consigned to the past. It's hard to see how they remain relevant following the seismic changes of the past number of months.

As we move through Q4 and into 2021, we are operating in a world of new priorities for engagement with consumers. However, amidst the turmoil, what will remain constant is the notion of Staying Local.

This is amplified by many factors including ongoing advice to restrict the numbers of people we meet and the fact that working from home has become the norm for many.

A highly trusted source of "always on" information that provided an important connection for homes with their local and national communities, local radio really proved its mettle since Lockdown and beyond. As a digitally adept, agile and responsive medium, both on-air or online, it became an important bridge between brands and the audiences they target. But what of the future?

We commissioned Amárach Research to explore where local radio sits in terms of its long-term influence on consumer priorities and engagement intentions.

The results of the work from Gerard O'Neill and his team are very revealing. To quote, "Our research shows the power of local radio at a time when a growing share of consumer spending and shopping behaviours are now driven by a focus on local options." 2020 is the year local radio became a national force for change.

These findings are significant for brands investing more in the medium and allows us to help them build authentic creative connections with communities around Ireland.

IRS+ delivers creative radio advertising, sponsorship and promotion solutions to agencies and brands directly. 15 independent local radio stations which, in addition to reaching 1.2 million listeners every week also connects with 1.1 million people on social media and consistently delivers 20% share of the total market.

The message from this research is clear – Local is Loud.

Peter Smyth, CEO, IRS+



## INTRODUCTION

We have lived through an extraordinary time in Ireland through 2020. In response to the COVID-19 public health emergency, millions of Irish people have been forced to learn new ways of living, working and communicating. Perhaps the biggest change wrought by the pandemic has been a renewed focus on local communities and neighbourhoods due to changing commuting and shopping behaviours.

This report is about the longer term consequences of these changes, especially for advertisers and media buyers who need to connect with the post-Covid-19 consumer. The claim in this report for IRS+ is that **the future is local**. To back up this claim we share the results of a survey over 2,000 Irish adults in July 2020 by Amárach Research.

The report is in three sections:

**1**

**The Local Media Landscape**

– we explore how media consumption has shifted during the pandemic and why local radio is set to be a bigger part of the landscape in future.

**2**

**Local Business Realities**

– as more consumer spending is re-distributed to sub-urban outlets and destinations, the role of local radio for advertisers will become more important.

**3**

**Local Community Priorities**

– we have to adjust to the 'New Abnormal' as seemingly temporary changes to behaviours become more permanent features of consumer markets, particularly benefiting local economies.

We think you'll agree by the time you review the evidence in our report that, indeed, the future is local.



## PART 1. THE LOCAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

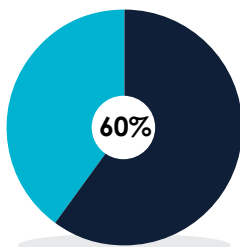
### Shifting Listening Habits

It is well known that Irish people love listening to the radio, indeed 3 in 4 adults listen to Ireland's local radio stations. During the lockdown we all spent more time at home, which impacted our listening, viewing and surfing habits considerably. Not surprisingly, local radio has been a bigger winner from this shift in media habits:

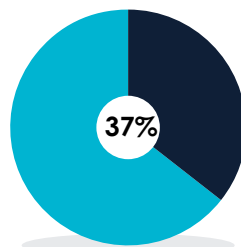
- Nearly 6 in 10 (57%) local radio listeners say they are listening more to local radio in recent months – 60% of IRS+ audiences.
- Women and 25-35 year olds are more likely to be listening more to local radio recently.

It would be wrong, however, to assume this is due to simply having 'more time'. In fact, when we probed why people are listening to local radio more often a number of key factors emerged:

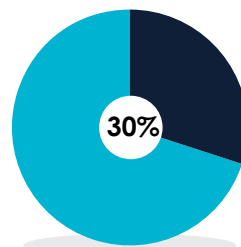
- **Relevance:** if you are going to spend more time in a place, then knowing what's going on around you is important, hence 61% gave this explanation – higher among younger people, women and those living in Munster or Connaught/Ulster.
- **Belonging:** when 'we are all in this together' then we mean your neighbours and community, hence 37% of those listening to local radio more often in recent months felt more of a sense of community listening to their radio – higher for older people, men and those living in Leinster outside Dublin.
- **Familiarity:** part of the personality of local radio for most listeners is that it sounds familiar and, obviously, 'local', so 30% gave this reason for listening more during the pandemic – higher among those living in Dublin.
- **Tone:** given the severity of the pandemic, many listeners wanted to 'dial back' the negativity in the media, hence 10% say they are listening more to local radio because national media is too 'gloomy' or 'scary' – men, young people and those in higher income groups are more likely to feel this.



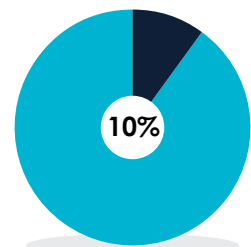
RELEVANCE



BELONGING



FAMILIARITY



TOPE

Local radio has come into its own during the coronavirus public health emergency and the measures taken to contain the spread of the virus. While local radio enjoyed a special place in the listening preferences of Irish people before the pandemic, our research shows that the emotional bonds between listeners and stations have, if anything, strengthened during the lockdown and its gradual easing, leaving a legacy of good will and greater engagement that will drive media consumption in future.

### Growing Dominance

As people spend more time working from home, shopping locally and enjoying 'staycations', the need to know what's going on around you becomes all the more pressing as your 'world view' becomes more localised and centred on where you live. Such changes are conducive to people becoming more interested in local news as it becomes more relevant and useful in their daily lives.

Our research shows that the majority of adults (62%) say that local radio is one of the best sources of local news. This is especially true for 25-45 year olds, and for people outside of Leinster (including Dublin). The figure is even higher for IRS+ audiences at 71%.

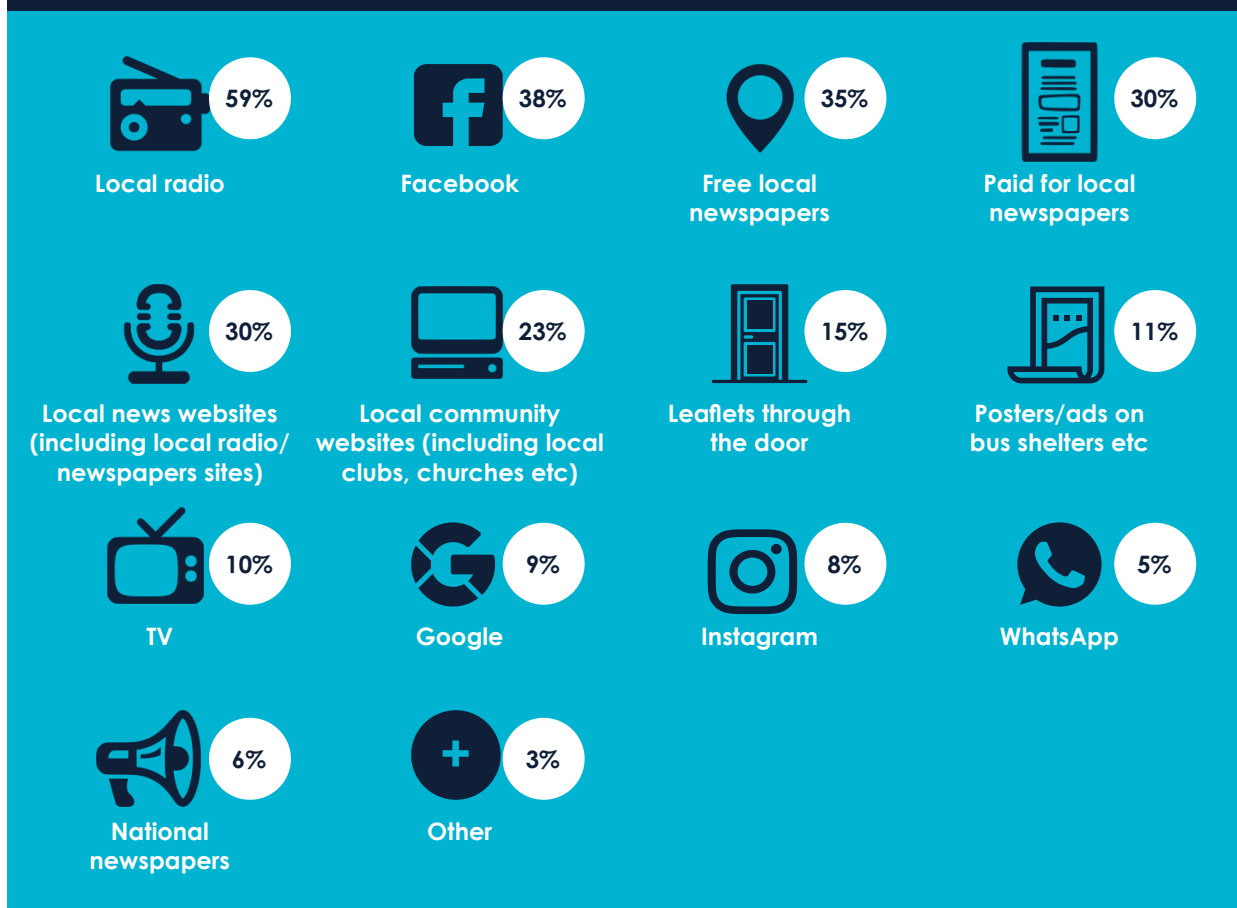
Of course, local radio does not have a monopoly on local news – people get the news from various sources. As the chart shows:

- Local newspapers and their websites are also important sources
- Social media, including Facebook and WhatsApp groups feature highly
- National media also report news items with local or regional relevance



Listeners are not just interested in the news. They also look to their radio and other local media for information about local sales and bargains (see part 2 below) as well as local entertainment. When it comes to the latter, local radio again dominates in terms of salience to potential movie goers, music fans and foodies, at 59% of all adults (69% of IRS+ listeners), especially those aged 40 and older.

**BEST SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT LOCAL ENTERTAINMENT – ANY MENTIONS**



Who will you trust?

We live in an age of fake news and, if anything, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted just how pressing a problem the issue has become. We therefore probed the issue of media trust in our survey, specifically in relation to trustworthy sources of local news. Here again, we can see the vital part played by local radio in informing and advising listeners and ensuring they are properly informed and provided with the right information.



We find that 35-55s and people outside of Dublin are more trusting of local radio for local news than other demographic groups (though local radio comes tops for all demographic groups). Such high levels of trust are vitally important as we learn that nearly half of all adults (48%) consider local radio to be extremely or quite important in terms of keeping their local community connected and informed (53% of IRS+ listeners).

Adults aged 25-45 are especially conscious of this role for local radio, as are women and those living outside Leinster. Given the pressures communities have been under during 2020, the role of local radio as trustworthy sources of connection and resilience is something that will continue to shape opinions and preferences for the foreseeable future.

We can measure the role local radio has played in people's experiences of the pandemic and lockdown through 2020. For example:

- *Attention:* 51% of adults agree they are paying a lot more attention to local radio than before the lockdown in order to know what's going on in the local area – rising to 63% of IRS+ listeners, and higher among women and people in Munster.
- *Positivity:* 64% agree that local radio has played a positive role in helping their community get through the pandemic – higher among under 35s and women.

These findings highlight the importance of local radio to create the shared experiences, values and beliefs that are vital to the wellbeing of any community that wants to survive and thrive beyond a national crisis such as the pandemic.

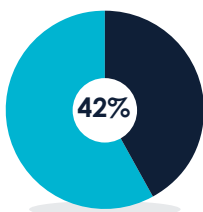
### Familiarity breeds contentment

Local radio has been an important part of Irish people's listening experiences since well before the COVID-19 public health emergency. The unique features of the medium have made it an integral part of many people's daily lives as revealed in our research:

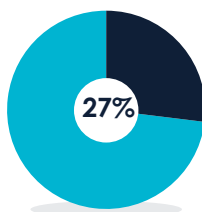
- *Keeping up to date about what's going on in local area:* 8 in 10 local radio listeners give this as their number one reason for liking local radio.
- *More relevant than national radio:* the second most common reason for over a third of listeners.
- *Prefer music selection:* joint second among local radio audiences (36%).
- *Source of conversation with neighbours/family:* for 30% of listeners.
- *Death notices:* for 3 in 10 listeners.

We get some sense of the engagement between local radio stations and their audiences when we look at the level of participation in various activities via local radio:

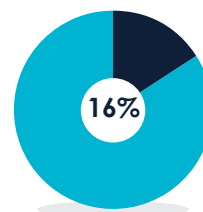
## LOCAL LISTENER ENGAGEMENT WITH STATION ACTIVITIES



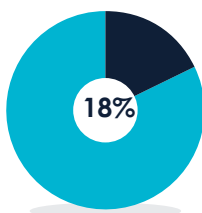
Took part in a quiz or survey



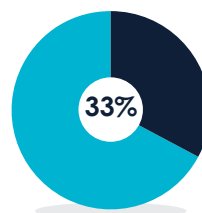
Asked a question during a show by phone or text



Asked for information about an event to be mentioned on the radio



Answered a call from your local radio station



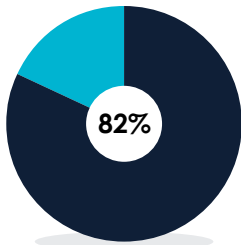
Other



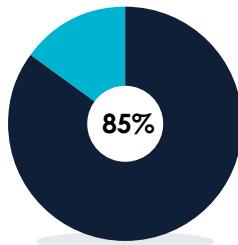
Among listeners, 35-55 year olds tend to be most engaged through these activities with their stations, though most other demographic groups are equally engaged.

Similarly we see a high degree of good will towards local radio, as evidenced by a number of measures in our study. These confirm that people have a sense of shared identity and connection with local radio that goes beyond simply passive listenership and consumption. For example:

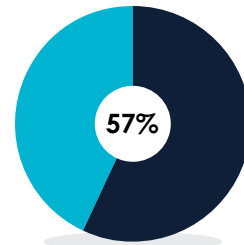
- **Professionalism:** 82% of local radio listeners agree the presenters on their local stations are as professional as those on national stations.
- **Empathy:** 85% feel that the presenters on local radio understand their audiences better than on national radio.
- **Persuasion:** 57% are more open to the views of local radio presenters than those on national radio.
- **Connection:** 82% would really miss their local radio station if it closed.
- **Relationship:** 69% of local radio listeners would really miss their favourite local radio presenters if they were no longer on air.



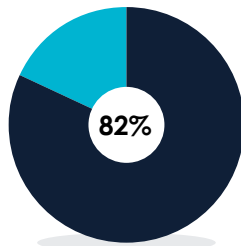
PROFESSIONALISM



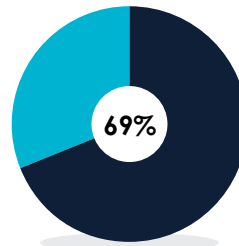
EMPATHY



PERSUASION



CONNECTION



RELATIONSHIP

Our research tells us that local radio has played a vital role in binding, guiding and informing communities throughout Ireland, a role that has not gone unnoticed by audiences as they adjust to the new realities of life after the pandemic.

In Part 2 we explore what this means for doing business locally in future, and the wider role of local radio in driving economic recovery.

## PART 2: LOCAL BUSINESS REALITIES

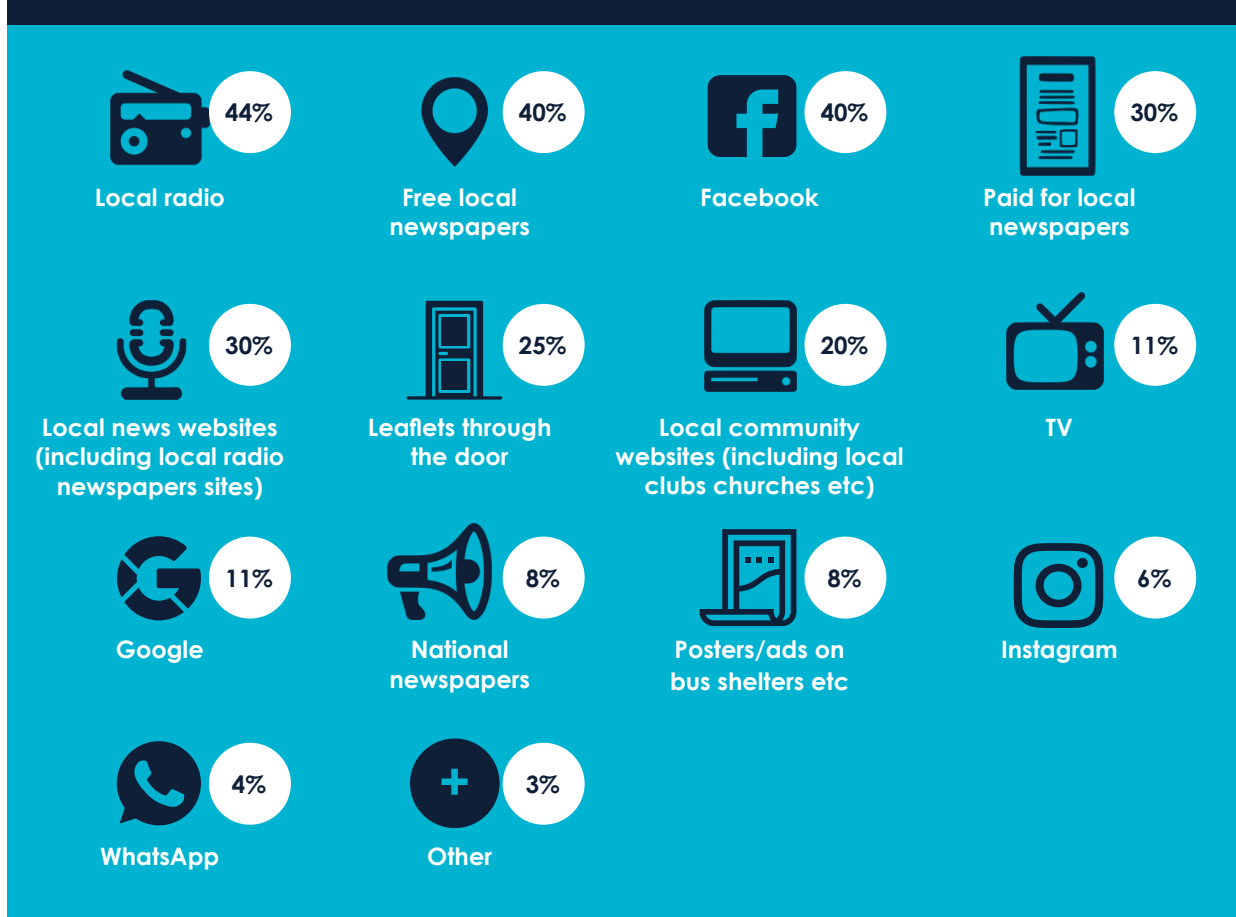
### Selling Local

The COVID-19 public health emergency has 'redistributed' a great deal of economic and commercial activity in its wake:

- **Working from home:** as hundreds of thousands are no longer commuting to work so they are spending more time and money in their local communities.
- **Leisure time:** even as earlier constraints have been lifted, many now spend their leisure time and euro at local outlets, including cafes and gyms.
- **Shopping patterns:** the pandemic has been a boon for sub-urban and town destinations outside the main city centres, and seems set to continue for the foreseeable future.

All of this means that consumer spending has been redistributed to local neighbourhoods, communities and shopping destinations in ways totally unanticipated at the start of 2020. It follows that local media are even more influential in influencing localised spending, and most adults agree:

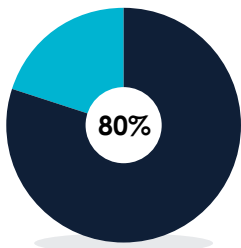
#### BEST SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT LOCAL SALES AND BARGAINS - ANY MENTION



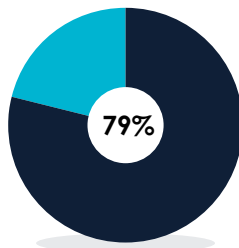
Local radio is especially influential on older adults, men and those outside Leinster when it comes to information about local sales and bargains. Of course, other media play a role too, especially local print media, but also social media.

Listeners to local radio recognise the importance of local stations to informing their choices as shoppers and consumers. For example:

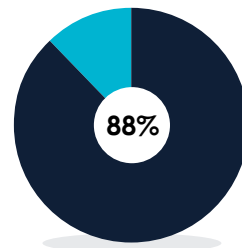
- **Initiative:** 80% of local radio listeners are more likely to support initiatives by local radio (e.g.: fund raising for charity) than national radio.
- **Targeting:** 79% agree that advertisements on local radio are more relevant to people like them.
- **Selling:** 88% think that local radio is a good way for brands and advertisers to tell them about products and services they might be interested in.



INITIATIVE



TARGETING

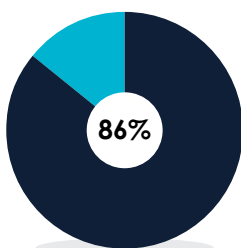


SELLING

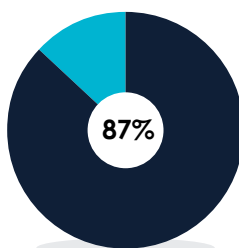
With such huge levels of positivity towards local radio as a commercial channel for local businesses and brands, it is clear that listeners across all demographic groups are open to persuasion when it comes to spending, borrowing and investing in their local communities via local radio.

Further proof for the power of local radio can be found in the levels of agreement with statements such as the following:

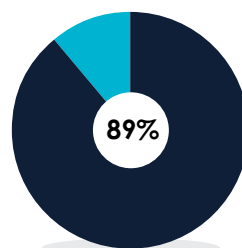
- **Shop Local:** 86% of all adults agree they are happy to shop locally more than before, even when I have a choice to shop elsewhere.
- **Support Local:** 87% of adults agree they deliberately try and shop in their local area to support retailers etc.
- **Stay Local:** 89% agree they will continue to shop locally as much as they can even after the lockdown is finally over.



SHOP LOCAL



SUPPORT LOCAL



STAY LOCAL

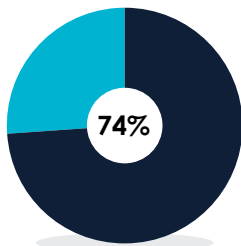
Open to persuasion

Perhaps the strongest measure of any broadcast medium is the extent to which it changes people's shopping habits and preferences. In our study we asked local radio listeners whether they had ever switched a brand they buy or store they shop in, or tried a new store or brand because of advertising on local radio? The results are staggering:

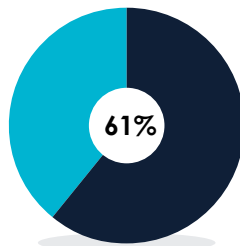
- 4 in 10 local radio listeners (38%) say they have indeed switched due to local radio advertising – a further 1 in 4 'can't remember', and less than 2 in 5 doesn't think they have been persuaded to switch.

Those more likely to have been persuaded include people over 45, women and those living outside of Leinster. Moreover, local radio audiences want to hear more from their stations about things that are relevant to them. From our survey:

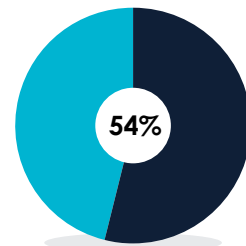
- **Savings:** 74% of listeners would like to hear more about special deals and offers in shops etc in their area from their local radio.
- **Openings:** 61% would like to hear more about new shops and stores opening in their area.
- **Jobs:** over half (54%) of listeners would like to hear about job vacancies in their local community.
- **Money:** 46% would like to hear about websites and apps that can help them save money.
- **Property:** 29% of local radio listeners would like to hear about places to buy or rent in their area through their local stations.



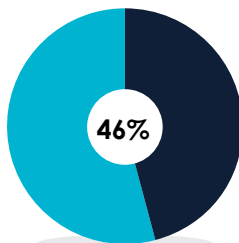
SAVINGS



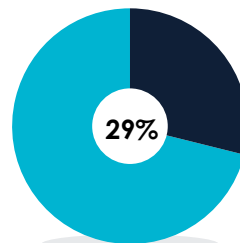
OPENINGS



JOBS



MONEY



PROPERTY

There is a clear understanding on the part of listeners that local radio can and should play a key role in driving economic recovery after the pandemic ends, driven by their own preferences for shopping and spending locally in future:

- **Local Advertisers:** 67% of local radio listeners will be more likely in future to buy from a brand or shop that advertises on local radio – especially over 35s.
- **Me-vertisements:** 88% agree that 'businesses in my area should use local radio more to advertise to people like me'.
- **Recovery:** 80% agree Local radio will play key part in helping our community recovery when the pandemic is over.

These and other findings point to a huge opportunity for Ireland's advertisers, brands and media decision makers to connect with Irish consumers in a powerful and engaging way via local radio.

## Size of the prize

How can we measure the commercial value of local radio audiences to advertisers and marketers as we exit the pandemic? One measure is to look at the share of the IRS+ audience in total spending in various sectors, using data from our survey.

When we take average spending for all adults and look at the share of IRS+ listeners in the total adult population (18+) of 3.71 million, we find the following:

- **Mobile services:** IRS+ listeners account for 58% of all consumer spending
- **Broadband:** IRS+ listeners account for 56% of all consumer spending
- **Groceries:** IRS+ listeners account for 58% of all consumer spending
- **Electricity:** IRS+ listeners account for 58% of all consumer spending

As more consumer spending switches to local communities, stores and service providers, we can expect the economic footprint of local radio to grow significantly in the months and years ahead.

In Part 3 we look at what citizens and consumers want for the future of their local communities and how local radio can help ensure that the future is local.

## PART 3: LOCAL COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

### *All business is local*

One of the most pervasive impacts of the pandemic and the lockdown has been the phenomenon of working from home. Over 1 in 4 adults in our survey are working from home because of the lockdown – and enormous share of the population and the workforce for such a recent change in working practices.

The result, of course, is that people are spending more time at home and therefore are more familiar with their neighbourhoods and communities than ever before. It is clear from our survey that the experience of the lockdown from a community perspective has on balance been very positive. For example:

- **Stronger:** 77% of all adults agree that there is a stronger sense of community where I live since the lockdown.
- **Neighbours:** 57% of adults agree that they have gotten to know their neighbours better since the lockdown (61% in Dublin).
- **Knowledge:** 57% feel they know more about their local area and community since the lockdown (63% of 25-34 year olds).
- **Pride:** 76% feel that people in their area should be proud of how they helped each other during the lockdown (79% of women).

Looking to the future, it is also clear that the vast majority of Irish people don't want to lose the positive things we have gained as a result of the pandemic, especially at a local level. We find that:

- **Community:** 75% of adults wouldn't want to lose the sense of community that has developed during the lockdown after it is over (81% of IRS+ listeners).
- **Connection:** 89% agree they will continue to stay in touch and help out with neighbours and their local community after the lockdown
- **Together:** 93% agree we will all need to work together in our community to help with the recovery in the local economy.
- **Support:** 94% agree people will need to do more to support local businesses and employers when the lockdown is finally over.
- **Attention:** 64% of adults will pay more attention to local radio after the lockdown so they know what's going on in their area (higher among women).

Moreover, we find that there is a renewed enthusiasm for 'living locally' that bodes well for the future. Two thirds of adults say their experience of the lockdown has made them want to spend more time where they live locally rather than commuting etc. In fact, 69% of all those currently working from home would like to spend more time working from home in future once the lockdown is over.

In conclusion, our research captures a critical moment in the transition to a post-pandemic world for Irish citizens and communities. The findings show that local radio has not only supported people through the pandemic but looks set to play an important role after it is over.

The research also shows the power of local radio at a time when a growing share of consumer spending and shopping behaviours are now driven by a focus on local options. So long as this continues we can confidently predict that the Future is Local.

## APPENDICES

### About IRS+



RS+ is a dynamic, innovative centralised media sales and marketing bureau, serving independent local and national, broadcast and digital media channels.

For media owners, IRS+ offers promotion, sales and representation to agencies, creative media specialists and direct clients. For advertisers and their agencies, IRS+ offers a range of off the shelf and bespoke packages targeting specific demographics at local and national level.

IRS+ provides unrivalled access to community and local audiences throughout Ireland, through its long association with independent radio stations.

Our specialisation is the targeting of local, grass roots audiences through on the ground local media.

### About Amárach



Amárach is an independent research consultancy, measuring the commercial and policy implications of consumer and business trends in Ireland and abroad.

### Methodology

Amárach conducted an online, representative survey of over 2,000 adults aged 18 and over throughout the Republic of Ireland in July 2020.