

Finding The News

HOW AGE, LANGUAGE, AND GEOGRAPHY
INFLUENCE CANADIANS' MEDIA CHOICES



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A DISCUSSION PAPER FROM

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NOTE: On August 20, 2015, we published a discussion paper titled “Canada’s Digital Divides”, which outlined some of the economic and technological challenges facing Canadian media, with a particular focus on print daily newspapers and local broadcast television.¹ Since then, we have been able to access data from Statistics Canada’s General Social Survey, which provides additional useful information on how Canadians follow the news. Those additional data are summarized in this discussion paper.

Introduction

How do Canadians stay informed? How do they find the news? And how is finding the news – and the way the news is consumed – affected by age, language, and geography?

These are important questions, not only for the media that are the suppliers of that news, but also, in a broader way, for society as a whole, as Canadians seek to stay informed about everything from the local school board to national politics to international developments.

Over the past few months, Statistics Canada has been releasing a series of articles based on the results of the General Social Survey for 2013. This is a survey undertaken periodically by Statistics Canada,² and, for 2013, it had a sample size of 27,695, which makes it possible to do many different kinds of tabulations and cross-tabulations that would not be practical with a much smaller sample size.³

In one of the recent articles, published in October 2015, Statistics Canada included a table that dealt with the media Canadians use to follow news or current affairs, broken down by age groups. Respondents had the option of indicating more than one medium used for this purpose, among the Internet, newspapers, magazines, radio, and television.

Because of the sample size, we were able to arrange for custom tabulations of similar data, broken down not only by age groups, but also by home language, and by size (population) of area of residence. We were then able to access relevant data from the General Social Survey for 2003, and additional data from a survey that Statistics Canada conducted in 1978 that dealt with Canadians and newspapers.

We have also accessed more recent survey data on the way young adults (under 35) consume news – and it appears to be very different than previous patterns of news consumption.

When all of these data are considered together, an interesting picture emerges of how generational change interacts with technology to alter the way we find the news and stay informed.⁴

¹ Available at: http://media-cmi.com/downloads/CMI_Discussion_Paper_Digital_Divides_082015.pdf.

² The General Social Survey includes a wide range of questions, which may vary from survey to survey, and questions relating to media as news sources are not necessarily included on each General Social Survey.

³ The survey covered persons 15 years of age and over, living in the 10 Canadian provinces.

⁴ In comparing among media and over time, please note that our focus here is news, and that the content of those media may include various entertainment components in addition to news, all of which form part of their value to their consumers.

At the outset, we would acknowledge that, even since 2013, a number of changes in news consumption may well have occurred. However, we believe that a) the analysis made possible by the large sample size in the 2013 General Social Survey provides a useful set of benchmarks for more recent surveys; and b) the more recent trends appear to be consistent with the trends identified in the following analysis.

1978: Canadians, newspapers, and an important question about younger readers

In February 1978, with the assistance of the federal Department of the Secretary of State, Statistics Canada surveyed approximately 20,000 Canadians aged 15 and over about their use of newspapers.⁵ The results of that survey were summarized and analyzed in an article that appeared in the July 1979 issue of the *Canadian Statistical Review*.⁶

The article analyzed the data, by age of respondent, for those who said they read newspapers, and the time they spent reading newspapers:

Two conclusions are immediately apparent ... fewer young people read newspapers, and even those who do, spend less time on them than do their elders.⁷

The article went on to note:

We must remember that people under thirty constitute the group of Canadians who did not experience the pre-television era. All of them spent even their earliest childhood in the presence of television. Today we must ask whether TV is actually in the process of replacing the newspaper as we have known it, or whether, as they grow older, these young people will turn to the newspapers, and, following in their parents' footsteps, become regular readers of news, editorials, financial reports and articles on household matters.⁸

That is, of course, one of the perennial questions that has been asked about new media in relation to established media – will young people take their media habits with them as they age, or will they adopt the media habits of their parents? For example, one could also modify that paragraph from 1979 to reflect the second decade of the 21st Century, and refer to the “pre-Internet era” and the impact of the Internet generation on television.

After posing the question noted above, the author of the 1979 article observed:

Before answering such a question conclusively, we must have something more than a survey like the one carried out in February 1978. In the future surveys which Statistics Canada will doubtless undertake, it will be important to check the attitudes toward newspapers prevalent among people who at present seem to take no interest in them.⁹

⁵ In addition to the data summarized here, the survey also asked respondents what sections of the newspaper they read. Among the findings was that, overall, only 27 per cent reported reading the editorials – which may provide some additional perspective to the debate over the wisdom and/or impact of newspaper endorsements in election campaigns.

⁶ Yvon Ferland, “The Canadian and his Newspaper”, *Canadian Statistical Review* (Statistics Canada), July 1979, pp. vi-xiv.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

2003 and 2013: Assessing the relative use of five different media to access news and current affairs

In 2003, Statistics Canada’s General Social Survey covered a sample of about 25,000 Canadians aged 15 and over, and included questions about which media Canadians used to access news and current affairs; respondents were able to indicate they used one or more of: the Internet, newspapers, magazines, radio, and television.

The results of that portion of the 2003 survey were summarized and analyzed in an article that appeared in the Summer 2007 issue of *Canadian Social Trends*.¹⁰

As noted above, Statistics Canada included similar media-use questions on its General Social Survey for 2013, and reference was made to some of those data in an article that Statistics Canada published on October 7, 2015.¹¹

We have since accessed additional custom tabulations from this most recent survey, and those tabulations form the basis for the data and charts that follow.

While the questions asked in 2013 were similar to those asked in 2003, there were some slight differences, and there were also some differences in how the data were reported. In both years, respondents were asked about their frequency of using media for news and current affairs, as well as the media they used. (Respondents could select as many of the five media that were applicable to their experience.)

The frequency options are summarized below:

2003 Survey	2013 Survey
Daily	Daily
Several times each week	Several times each week
Several times each month	Several times each month
Rarely or never	Rarely
	Never

For 2003, Statistics Canada’s published results focused on “frequent” users of media for news and current affairs, while the published results for 2013 focused on those who used media for news and current affairs “at least occasionally”. The difference is this – the report on the 2003 data was based on the combination of “daily” and “several times each week”, while the report on the most recent (2013) data is for all frequencies, including “rarely”.¹²

In order to compare the most recent (2013) data with the previous (2003) data, we have accessed custom tabulations for 2013 that match the frequency data used in presenting the 2003 survey results. Thus, the data in Figure 1 are based on the same definition of “frequent” used in the analysis of the 2003 data. In our subsequent analysis of the data for 2013, we have used the “occasional” definition that Statistics Canada has adopted in reporting on the most recent survey.

¹⁰ Leslie-Anne Keown, “Keeping up with the times: Canadians and their news media diet”, *Canadian Social Trends* (Statistics Canada), Summer 2007, pp. 12-28.

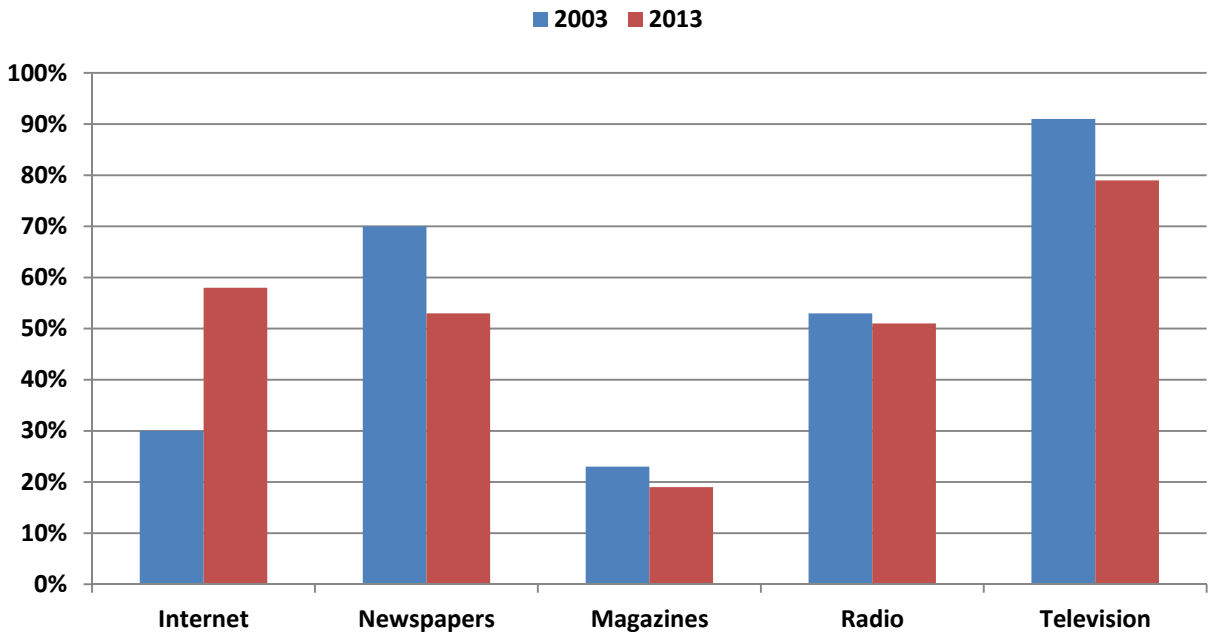
¹¹ Martin Turcotte, “Political participation and civic engagement of youth”, *Insights on Canadian Society*, October 2015 (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-006-X).

¹² It should be noted that, in the 2013 survey, the first two frequency categories combined contained more than 80 per cent of the respondents in the larger “occasionally” category.

The growth of the Internet as a source of news

Figure 1 compares the most recent data (2013) with the data for 2003. As indicated in Figure 1, the most significant change was in the growth of the Internet as a source of news, almost doubling from 30 per cent to 58 per cent. The most significant decline was in the percentage for newspapers. Television remained in first place, and radio had the smallest change, indicating the enduring role of the original broadcast medium.

1. Media used by frequent news consumers, 2003 and 2013



NOTE: The 2003 data were based on all persons 19+; the 2013 data were based on all persons 15+.

SOURCE: Statistics Canada, General Social Surveys.

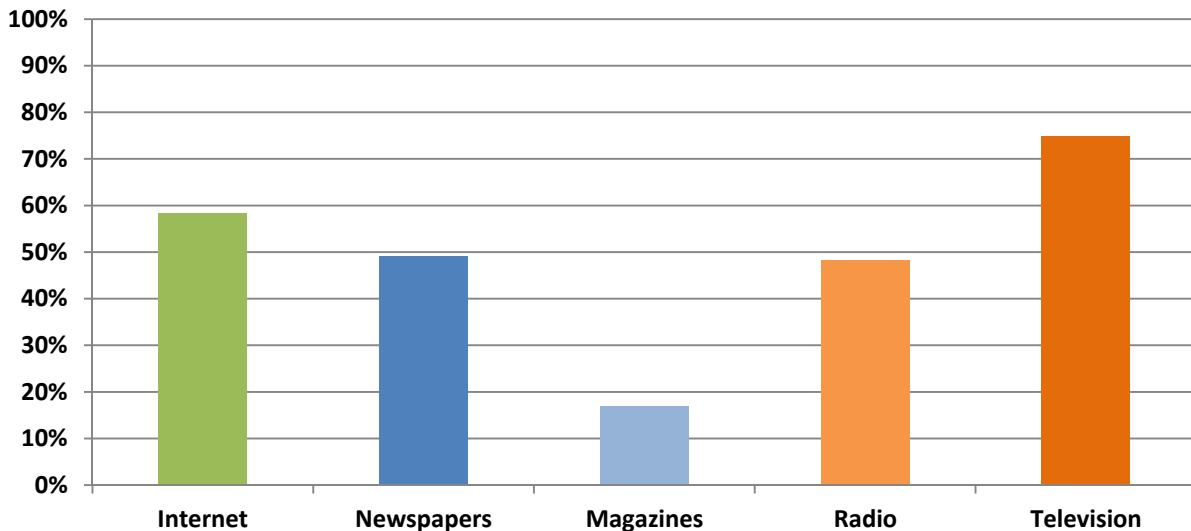
The most recent results – by age, language, and geography

Detailed results from the most recent survey are summarized on the following pages. Figure 2 presents the overall data. As noted, the data in Figure 2 and subsequent figures are based on those who “followed news or current affairs at least occasionally”. As indicated in Figure 2, the pattern of usage for the broader group of “occasional” users is similar to the pattern of usage for the “frequent” user group.

In Figures 3 through 7, we have summarized the data for each of the four main media,¹³ and for a number of important variables, including age, home language, size (population) of area of residence, provinces/regions, and Canada’s six largest Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs).

¹³ Please note that, in the 2013 survey, Statistics Canada specifically referred to print newspapers and print magazines.

2. Media used by those who followed news or current affairs at least occasionally (persons 15+), Canada, 2013



SOURCE: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey.

Figure 3 looks at the four main media by age group. In the case of the Internet, there is a clear relationship between age and usage as a news source, with usage declining as age increases. For print newspapers, the reverse appears to be true, with usage increasing with age. For radio, the pattern is not as definitive – use of radio as a source of news appears to peak in the 45-54 age group, but exceeds print newspapers in the three age groups between 25 and 54. Television also follows a young-to-old increasing usage curve, but at higher levels than is the case for print newspapers.

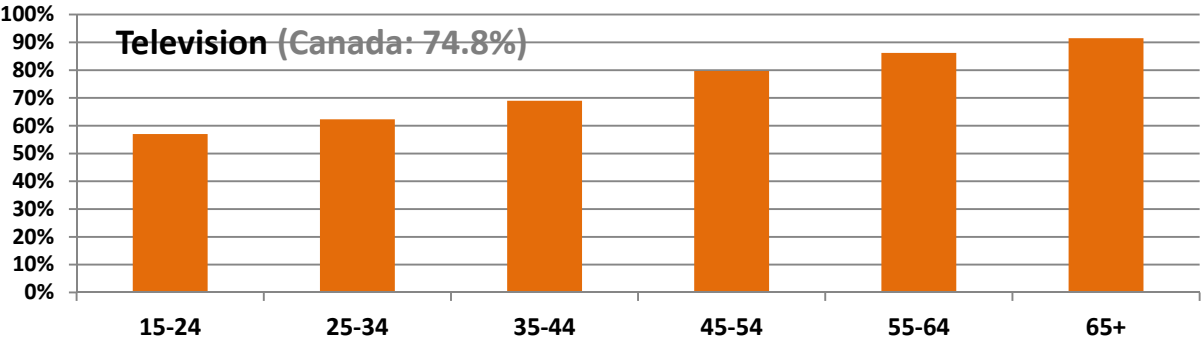
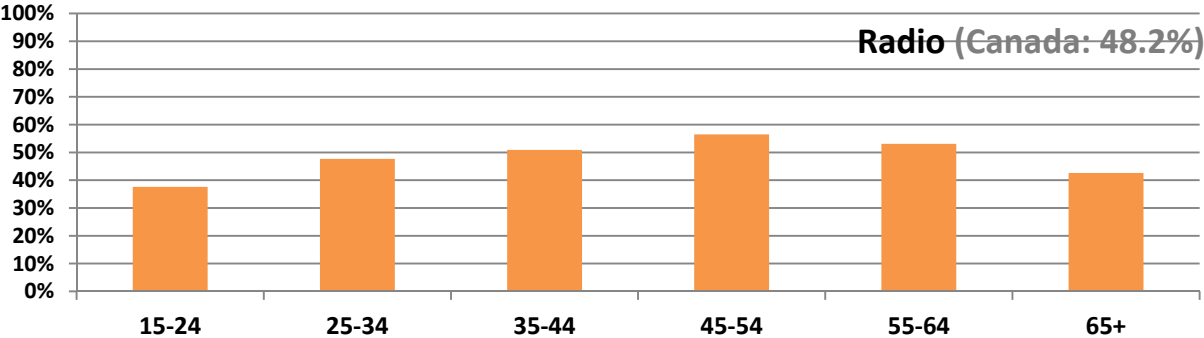
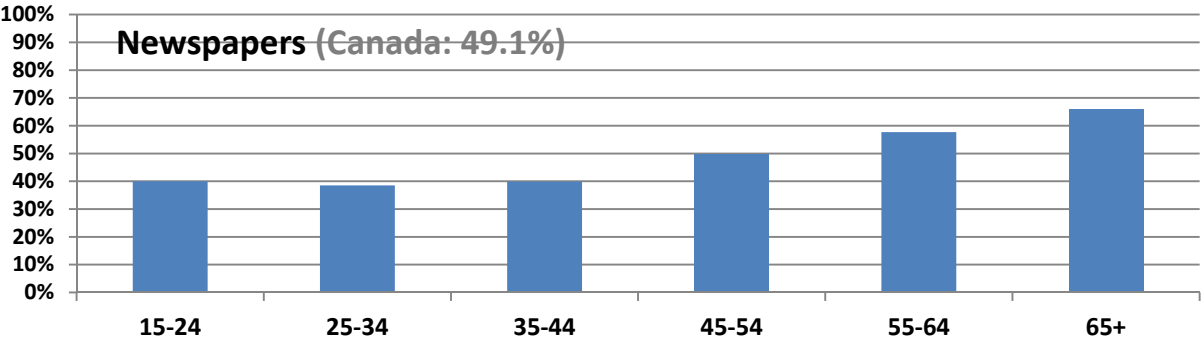
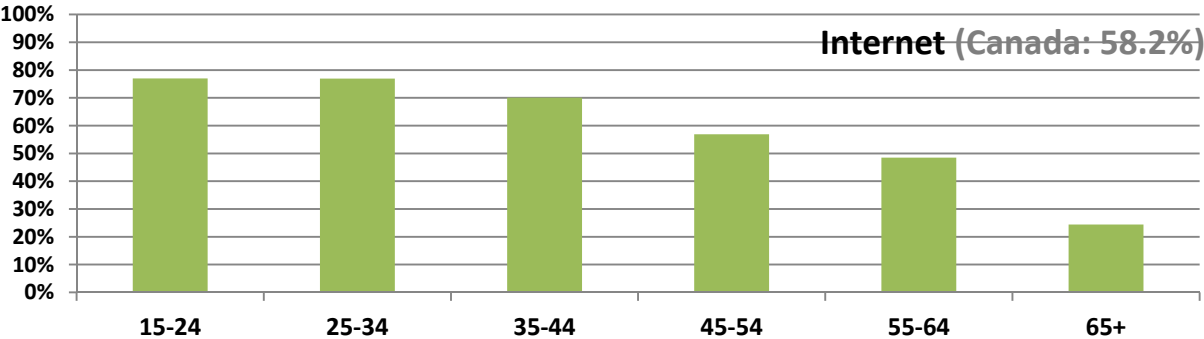
Figure 4 compares the news media usage by the language used in the household of the respondent. For the Internet as a source of news, the highest percentage was found in the “other language” group, followed by English, and then French. For print newspapers, the highest percentage was recorded for respondents in French-speaking households, followed by English, and then “other language”. For radio, there was little difference between the percentages for English or French, but the percentage for “other language” was lower. For television, the highest percentage was in French-speaking households, followed by English and “other language”.

Figure 5 compares the data by size (population) of areas of residence. While the differences are not as pronounced as they were for age groups, the use of the Internet as a news source has higher percentages in larger areas, while the use of broadcast media as a news source has somewhat higher percentages in smaller markets.

Figure 6 presents data for provinces and regions, and **Figure 7** presents data for Canada’s six largest Census Metropolitan Areas (those with metro populations in excess of one million). It is interesting to note (in Figure 7) that, among the six largest CMAs, Calgary had the highest percentage for those indicating the Internet as a news source, and the lowest percentage for print newspapers.

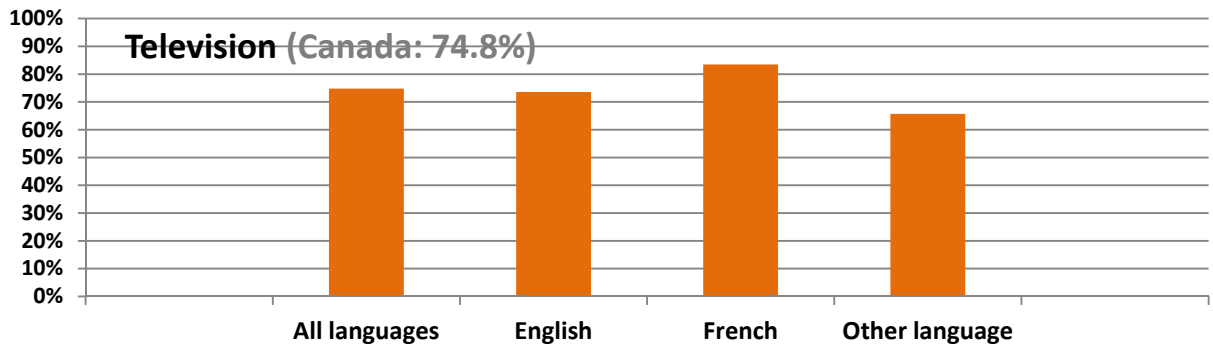
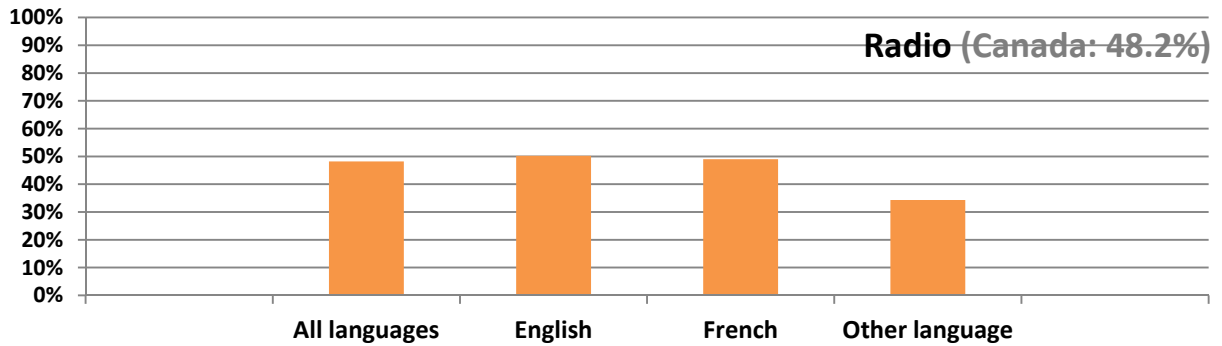
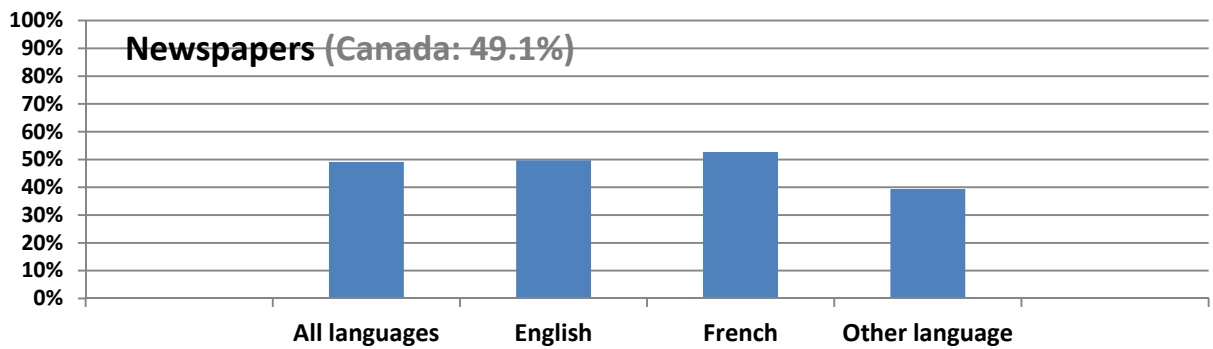
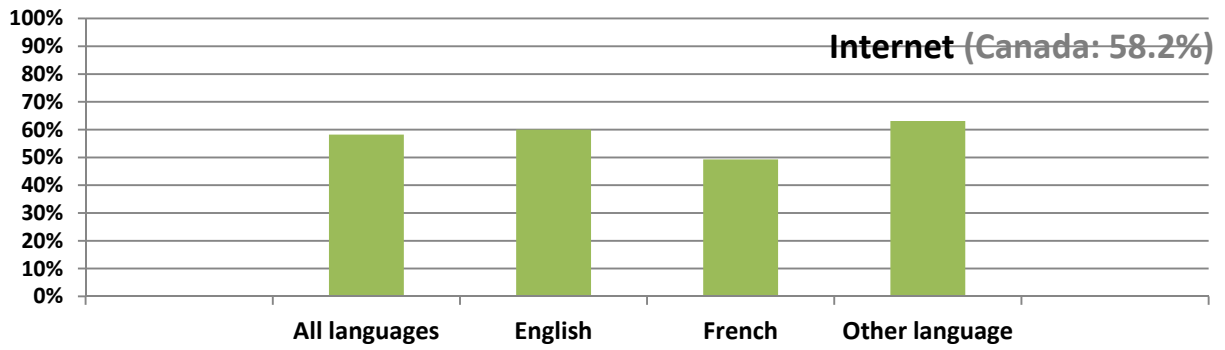
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3. Media used by those who followed news or current affairs at least occasionally (persons 15+), Canada, 2013 – by age group



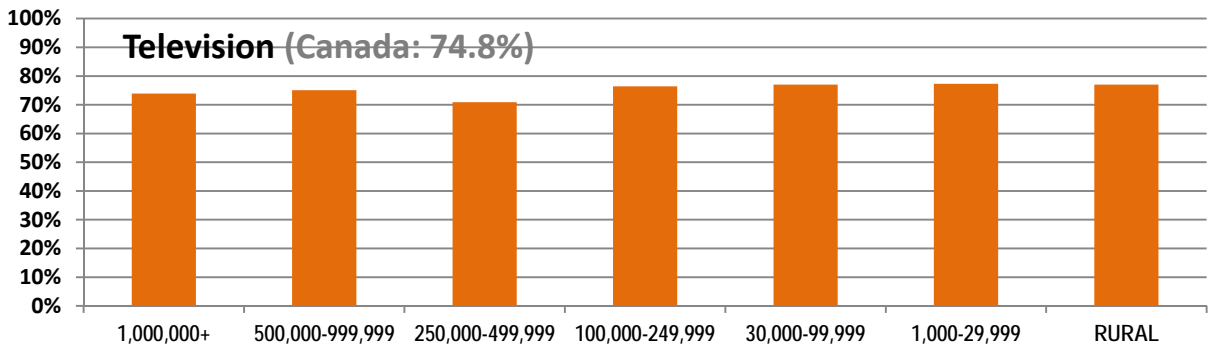
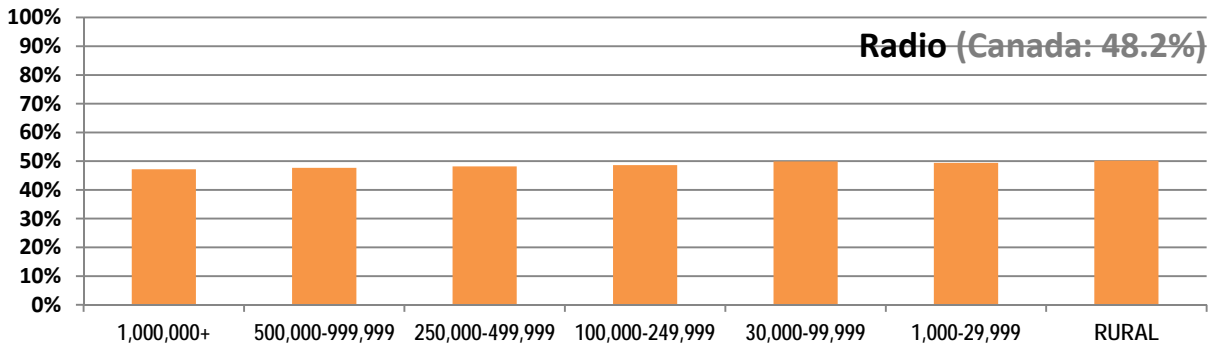
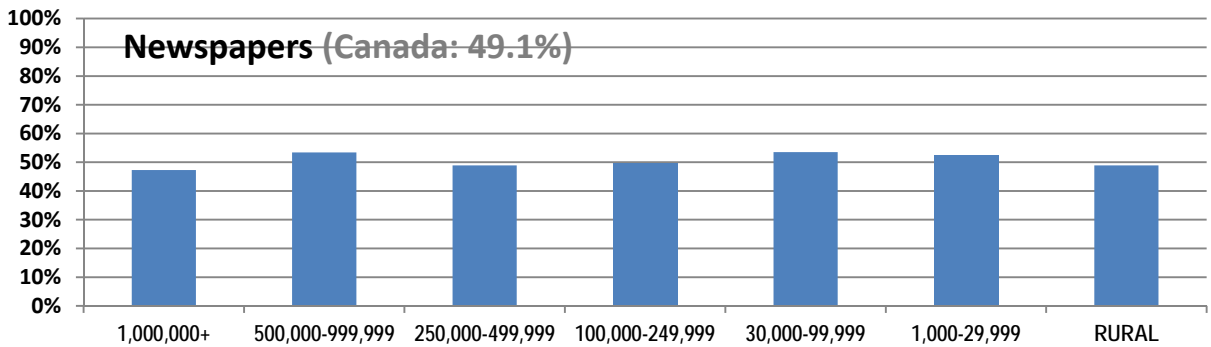
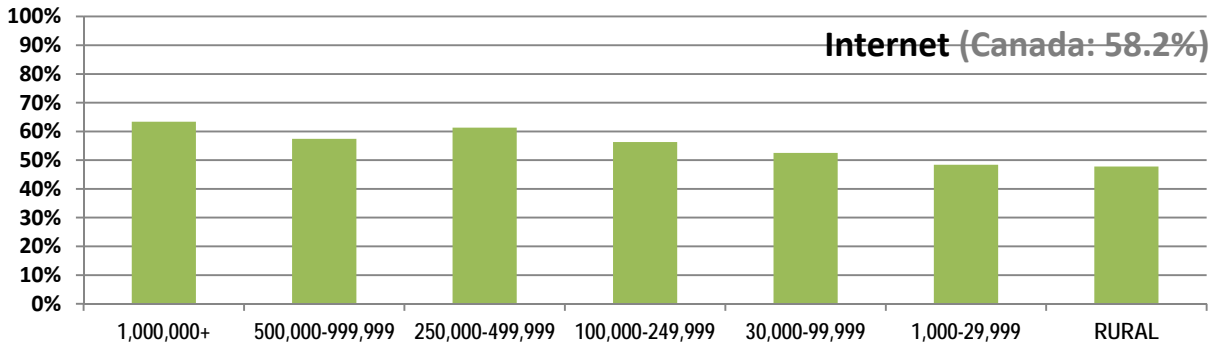
SOURCE: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey.

4. Media used by those who followed news or current affairs at least occasionally (persons 15+), Canada, 2013 – by home language



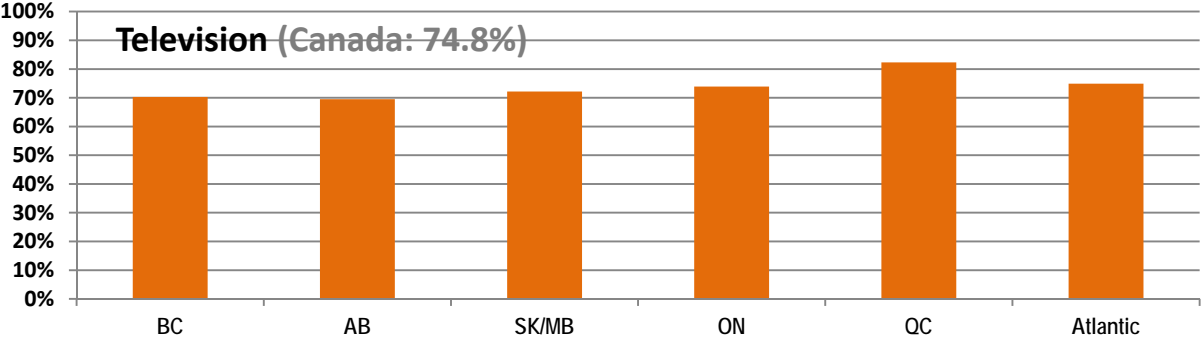
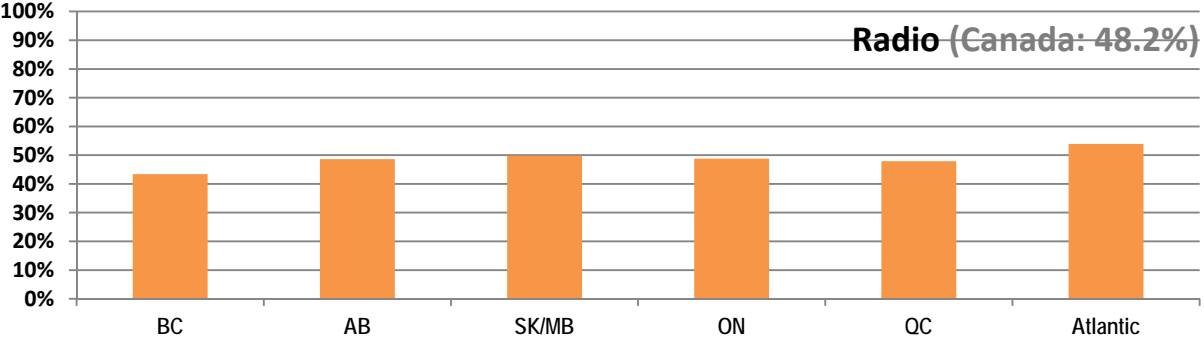
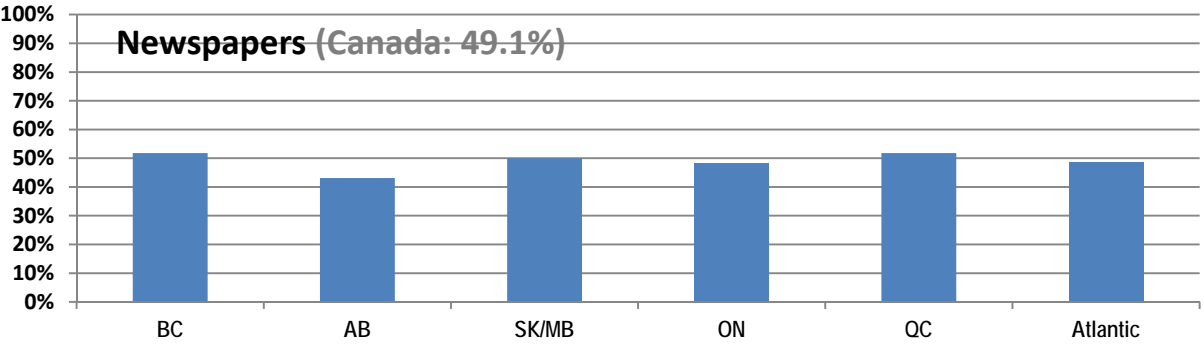
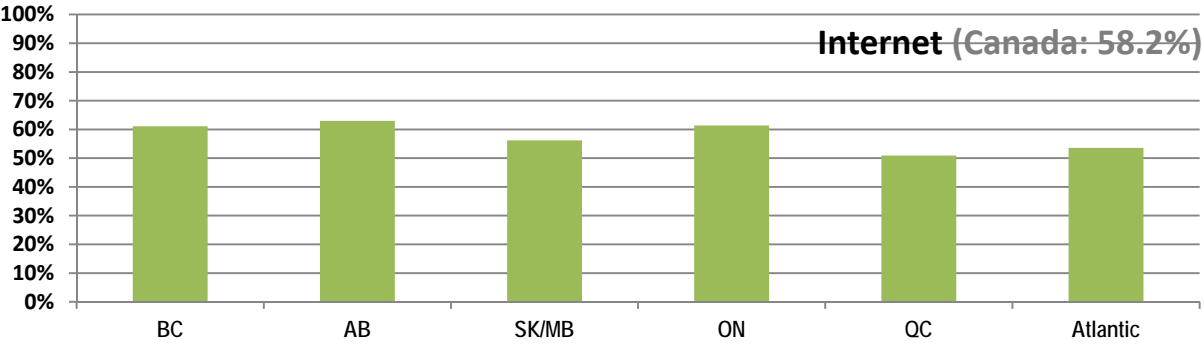
SOURCE: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey.

5. Media used by those who followed news or current affairs at least occasionally (persons 15+), Canada, 2013 – by size (population) of area of residence



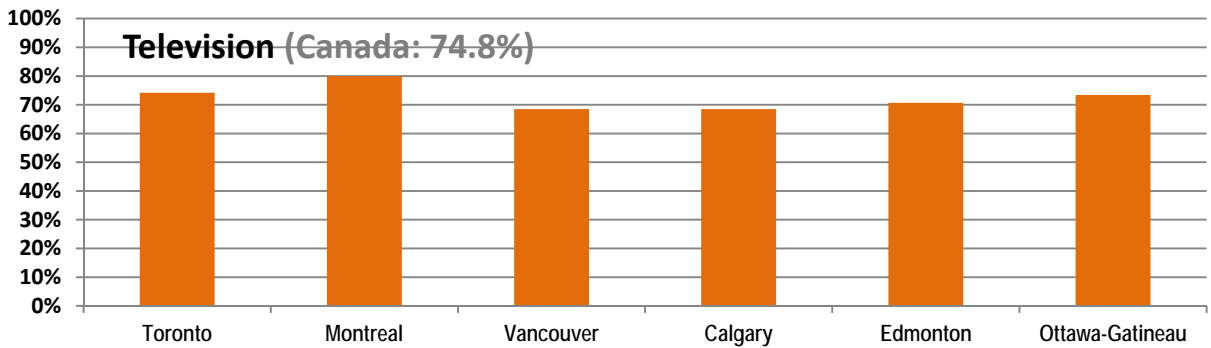
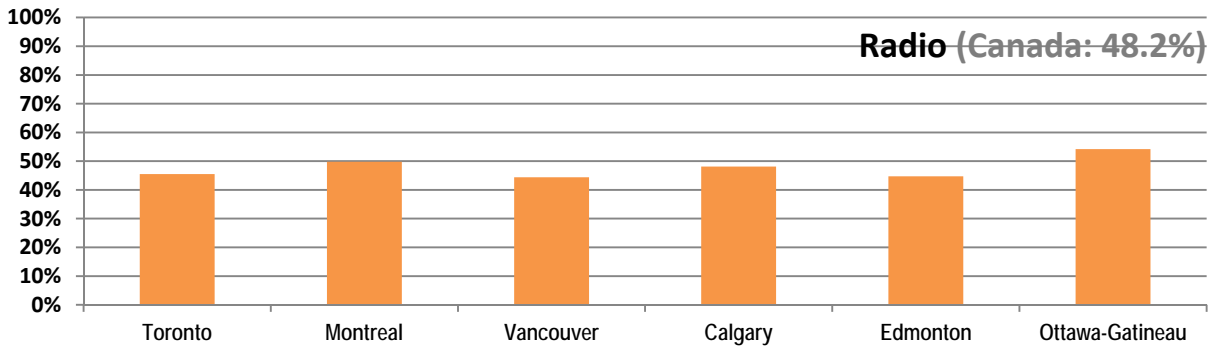
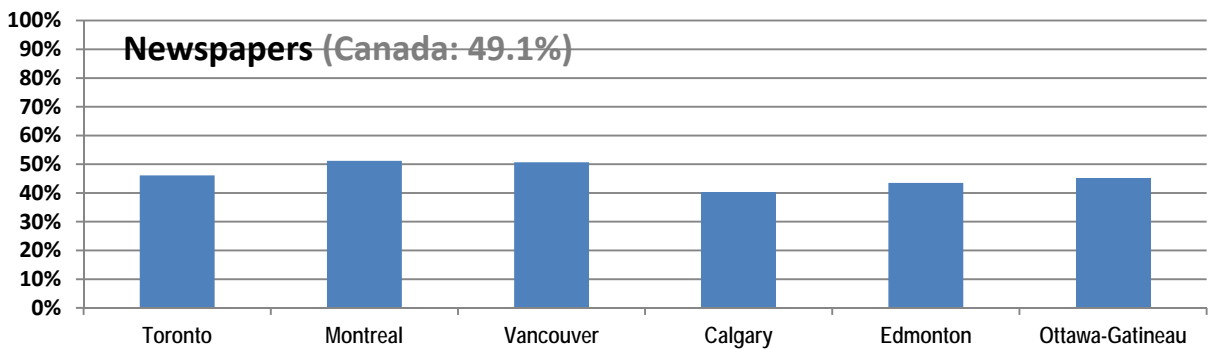
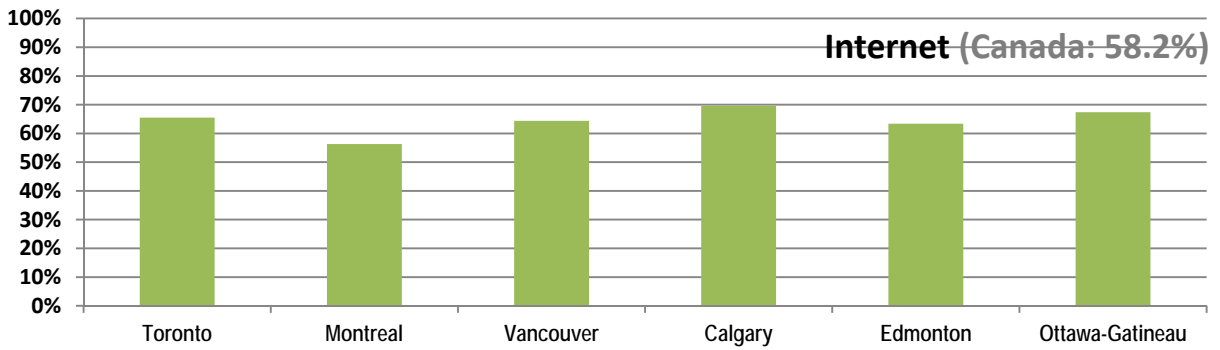
SOURCE: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey.

6. Media used by those who followed news or current affairs at least occasionally (persons 15+), Canada, 2013 – by province/region



SOURCE: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey.

7. Media used by those who followed news or current affairs at least occasionally (persons 15+), Canada, 2013 – six largest Census Metropolitan Areas



SOURCE: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey.

Not just different platforms, but different ways of consuming the news

The data on the media that Canadians use for news show clear differences among age groups, with younger groups indicating that the Internet is their dominant source for news. To add some additional context, we would note a U.S. report released in March 2015 by the Media Insight Project, which is a collaboration of the American Press Institute and the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The report is titled *How Millennials Get News: Inside the Habits of America's First Digital Generation*.¹⁴

The Media Insight report defines “Millennials” as adults age 18-34, which corresponds relatively closely to the two youngest age groups in the data from Statistics Canada’s General Social Survey.

The Media Insight report notes that Millennials are not “newsless”, as some may have feared, but that these younger adults “consume news and information in strikingly different ways”:¹⁵

This generation tends not to consume news in discreet sessions or by going directly to news providers. Instead, news and information are woven into an often continuous but mindful way that Millennials connect to the world generally, which mixes news with social connection, problem solving, social action, and entertainment.¹⁶

In other words, not only is there a new platform (the Internet), there is also a new method of news consumption.

As noted above, the Statistics Canada article which reported on the media-use data from the 2003 General Social Survey referred to “Canadians and their news media diet”, and a food analogy may be a useful way of describing old and new methods of news consumption.

Reading a newspaper, or listening to or watching a newscast on radio or television, might be thought of as a “meal” – professionally prepared, usually consumed at a fixed time, and containing a number of different elements. However, the description above of the Millennial approach to news might be characterized as a series of “snacks”, consumed in a very different context than traditional news presentations.

The Media Insight report found that, for the younger age groups, social networks provide an important pathway to the news. In that context, we would note that Statistics Canada’s General Social Survey also found that, among Internet users, the use of social networks was much higher for younger age groups, and declined as the age groups got older.

¹⁴ Available at: <http://mediainsight.org/Pages/how-millennials-get-news-inside-the-habits-of-americas-first-digital-generation.aspx>.

¹⁵ The Media Insight Project, *How Millennials Get News: Inside the Habits of America's First Digital Generation*, March 2015, p. 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Implications for Canada's "digital divides"

As noted in our earlier discussion paper ("Canada's Digital Divides"), trends in economics and technology threaten the future of printed daily newspapers and local broadcast television, which, in turn, raise serious questions about the economic underpinnings for journalism in the future.

The additional findings on media used for news by Canadians are consistent with the trends noted in the earlier discussion paper, and these additional data also help to frame the challenge going forward for print media, local broadcast television, and the local journalism they provide.

Clearly, private and public policies for our traditional media must be focused on how to maintain current levels of service as long as possible, while using that time to plan for the transition to a digital/online future.

To return to the analogy noted above, if the future consumption of news will increasingly resemble a series of "snacks" rather than a more formal "meal", how can we ensure that as many of those news "snacks" as possible are of high standard, Canadian, and local?