

SOCIAL NETWORKS TRANSFORMING HOW CANADIANS GET THE NEWS

April 27, 2011

Key findings

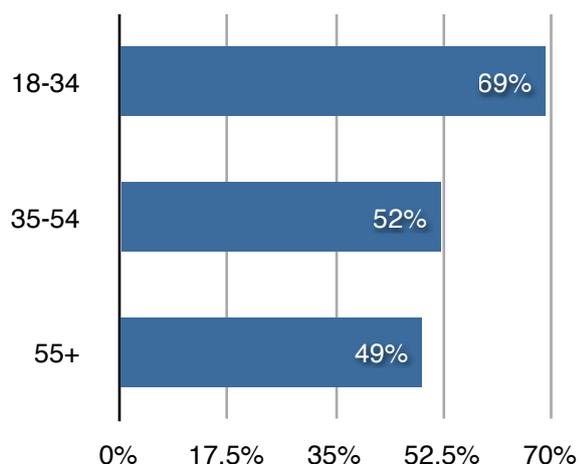
- More than two-thirds of Canadians who use social networking sites value them as a way of keeping up with the news.
- More than half of Canadians on social networks say they get a broader range of news and information from them than if they just relied on traditional media.
- One in three Canadians overall value social networks as a source for news, with the figure rising to one in two for young adults.
- But only one in four consider information from social networks as reliable.
- Canadians on social media are twice as likely to get their news from friends and family on social networks such as Facebook than from news organizations or journalists they follow.

Social networks becoming a source for news

News is increasingly becoming a shared social experience online for Canadians thanks to new digital platforms and services, according to a recent poll by the Canadian Media Research Consortium. An online survey of a representative national sample of 1,682 adults conducted by Angus Reid Public Opinion found that more than two-thirds (71 per cent) of Canadians who visit social networking sites use them to keep up with the news. This amounts to more than 10 million Canadians.

The survey shows how social networking sites are becoming a personalized news stream for Canadians of all ages, with news selected and filtered by family, friends and acquaintances. The idea of news as a social experience is important for Canadians. Close to two-thirds (64 per cent) say they value being able to easily share content with others. For young Canadians, the figure rises to 83%. Similar findings emerged in a Pew study in the

Figure 1: More news and information via social networks.



U.S. last year that indicated how news was becoming more social as news consumers shared links and recommendations in their social networks.¹

While news may be becoming more personal, many Canadians believe their social network provides them with a broader range of news and information than if they relied solely on traditional media. Almost two-thirds (59 per cent) who use social media say they are exposed to more news and information via their social networks, with the figure rising to 69 per cent for younger news consumers. (See Figure 1.)

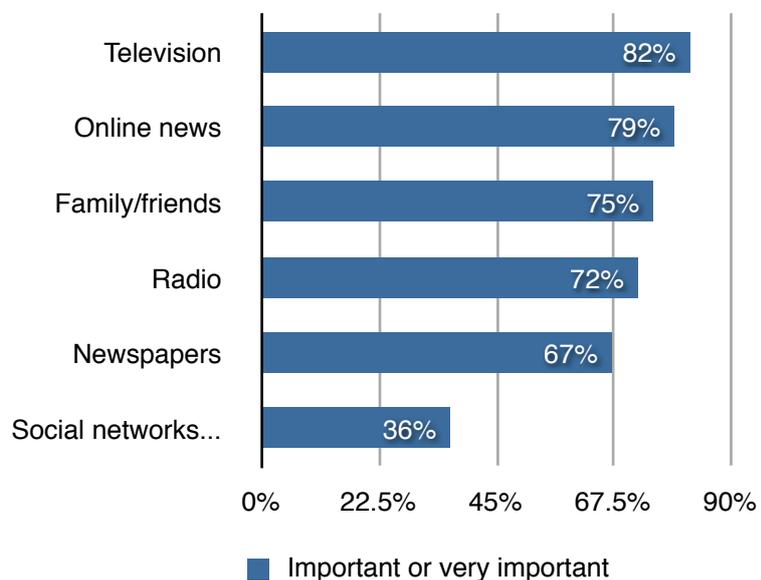
There are concerns that social networks may limit the breadth of information people receive. However, the survey's findings suggest that social media provide both personalization and serendipity; Canadians get news tailored to their interests, based on recommendations from people who know them, but also who make them aware of content they did not know about. Indeed, receiving a diverse range of news is important for Canadians; only one in five say they preferred news that shared their point of view.

In just the space of just a few years, social media services have become part of the news diet of Canadians. One in three Canadians (36%) consider social networking sites as an important source for news. Social networks are even more important for students. Almost two-thirds (61 per cent) of students cite social networks as an important source for news, comparable to the figures for print, television and radio.

However, social media still has some way to go as a source for news for Canadians of all ages. Overall, more established sources such as television and online news websites outstripped social networks, with four out of five of all Canadians online citing both TV and the Internet as important sources for news. (See Figure 2.)

Despite the use of social media for news, there are questions over reliability and trust. Established news outlets such as television and online news websites are seen as far more reliable sources for news than social networks. Just over 25 per cent rate of Canadians see social networks as reliable, compared to nine out of 10 for television, print newspapers, online news sites and radio. Younger Canadians (33 per cent), and particularly students (39 per cent), are more likely to trust information from social networks than older Canadians.

Figure 2: Importance as source of news and information.



The appeal of social media

Social media in its many forms has become so prevalent that it is hard to separate from how people experience the Internet. Social networking alone has become what Pew Research

¹ Understanding the Participatory News Consumer, Pew Internet, March 1 2010, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Online-News/Summary-of-Findings/Overview.aspx>

describes as a “global phenomenon”². Our survey found that 58 per cent of Canadians use social networks every month, while the majority of Canadians under 34 years old has visited a social networking service (82 per cent). Two-thirds of these younger adults visit social networking sites daily, often several times a day.

As might be expected, Canadians say that the main reason they use a social networking site is to keep in touch with friends and family. Social media is also valued as a source for entertainment, finding out personal information about others and being informed about social and community events.

While the survey did not ask people which service they used, Facebook is the most popular social networking site in Canada, with 18.5 millions users, accounting for 71 per cent of Canada’s online population³. By comparison, 13.5% of Canadian Internet users are on Twitter⁴.

Traditional media take up of social media

Social media is transforming how journalists and citizens relate to the news. Media organizations around the world have enthusiastically embraced social media as a way to distribute content as it offers new ways for news outlets to reach audiences, especially with younger news consumers. The survey shows how Canadians are relying on their personal network to filter the news, rather than just on professional news organizations.

Canadians value news links and recommendations from friends and family more than from journalists. Two in five social network users say they get their news from their personal social network compared to one in five who receive news from a news organization or a journalist on services such as Facebook.

Women and French-speaking Canadians, in particular, are using their social media feeds as their news editors. Social recommendations are a daily source of news for 49 per cent of women who use social media, compared to 36 per cent of men. It is also notably higher among French speakers in Quebec, with half saying they got some of their daily news from their friends and family.

While 20 per cent of social network users get their news from journalists on sites such as Facebook, the figure rises to 31 per cent for students. Journalists on social media also have more impact in French-speaking areas such as Quebec, with one in three turning to journalists they follow for news.

Twitter and the news

There is a similar pattern when it comes to getting news via Twitter. The social messaging service has emerged as a significant distribution network of news for French-speaking Canadians who use social media. Almost 40 per cent say they get some of their news from tweets distributed by friends and family, compared to 18 per cent for all Canadians on social media. Twitter is also more important for younger Canadians, with 25 per cent getting some of their news from tweets by their social circle.

At a time when many journalists are rapidly adopting Twitter as a way to share the news, only a minority of Canadians are getting news updates directly from them. Only one in ten of social media users say they get news via tweets from news professionals, with the figure slightly

² Understanding the Participatory News Consumer, Pew Internet, March 1 2010, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Online-News/Summary-of-Findings/Overview.aspx>

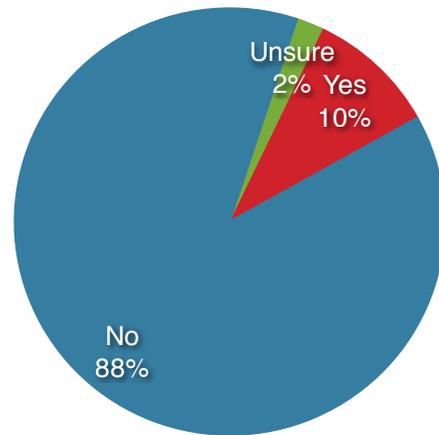
³ Source: SocialBakers.com, April 2011, <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/canada>

⁴ Source: comScore, August 2010, http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2010/8/Indonesia_Brazil_and_Venezuela_Lead_Global_Surge_in_Twitter_Usage

higher at 16 per cent for younger adults and at 17 per cent for students. But virtually no one over 55 on social media gets their news from journalists' tweets. (See Figures 3 and 4.)

The reason for these figures may be an uncertainty among audiences about whether journalists should use social media. The CMRC survey suggests that Canadians have mixed views as whether journalists should use services like Twitter to help report on trends and issues surrounding a news event. However, younger Canadians are more open to news professionals incorporating social media into their journalistic routines, with 52 per cent of under-34 year olds saying journalists should be on Twitter.

Figure 3: Tweets from a news organization or journalist.

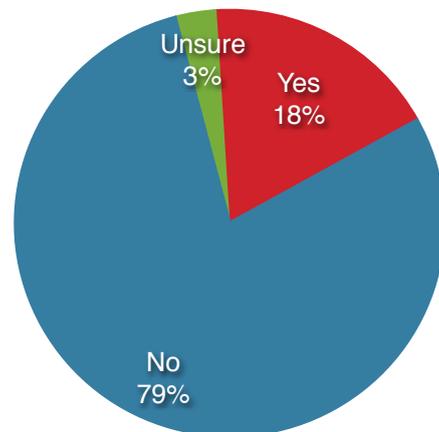


There is also a high degree of ambivalence over whether established media should incorporate information from social media in news reports. Established news organizations such as the BBC, CBC and CNN routinely incorporate news, photos and videos shared by citizens on social media into their professionally edited reports. A third of Canadians say they value the inclusion of social media content, with younger adults more open to the idea. Students, in particular, place greater worth on citizen-based media, with half saying they valued social media content.

The role of blogs

Blogs are a form of social media that have been widely adopted by journalists as the conversational, informal and personal format is seen as a way to connect with audiences. The survey found that only 21 per cent follow journalists or bloggers online. As might be expected, younger news consumers are more likely to read blogs, with the figure jumping to 43 per cent among students. French-speaking news consumers are more likely to read blogs: 27 per cent, compared to 19 per cent for English-speaking.

Figure 4: Tweets from individuals or organizations.



The research team wanted to find out if journalists' perceptions of the value of blogging matched those of news consumers. Journalists tend to use blogs to offer information that does not fit into a standard news report, as well as to provide some commentary and analysis on issues. The survey shows that the most common reason for reading blogs is to find out more details about a story. A similar number of people say they enjoyed reading the posts. Readers who read blogs also value the ability to gain a better understanding of the story, as well as finding out more about the journalistic process.

Blogs are less successful in connecting and engaging with audiences on a more personal level. Only a third say they turned to blogs to learn more about the author or to share their views on a story. The social aspect of blogging is more important to younger adults, particularly students. Learning more about a journalist is important for 60 per cent of students, while 57 per cent appreciated the ability to leave comments. The figures suggest that younger readers, especially those in college, see the appeal in the more personal, open and interactive form of journalism offered by blogs.

Conclusion

The rise and popularity of social media is affecting how Canadians get their news and from whom, especially given that more than 18 million Canadians are on Facebook alone. While we did not ask about the type of news content they shared, it is clear that many are relying on their online social network to alert them to news of interest. A significant portion of the audience is expecting the news to come to them, filtered by friends rather than only by trained professionals. The dissemination of news through social interaction has always affected the spread of news. New networked media technologies are extending the ability of news consumers to both create and receive personalized social news streams, undermining existing mass media business models based on delivering large audiences to advertisers. While social media creates new opportunities for the news industry to reach and engage audiences, particularly younger Canadians, it also represents competition for consumer attention and revenue.

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This is the third in a series of CMRC reports that looks into the changing news consumption habits of Canadians. The next report, which examines trust in the news media, will be released in two weeks.

CMRC website: <http://www.mediaaresearch.ca/>

From August 26 to August 30, 2010, Angus Reid Public Opinion conducted an online survey among 1,682 randomly selected Canadians adults, including 400 Francophones. The margin of error—which measures sampling variability—is +/- 2.5%, 19 times out of 20. The results were statistically weighted according to the most current Statistics Canada data on age, gender, region, and education to ensure a representative sample. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. Respondents were recruited from the Angus Reid Forum, Canada's premier national access panel of online respondents.