

THE CREDIBILITY GAP: CANADIANS AND THEIR NEWS MEDIA
Five Years Later

Canadian Media Research Consortium

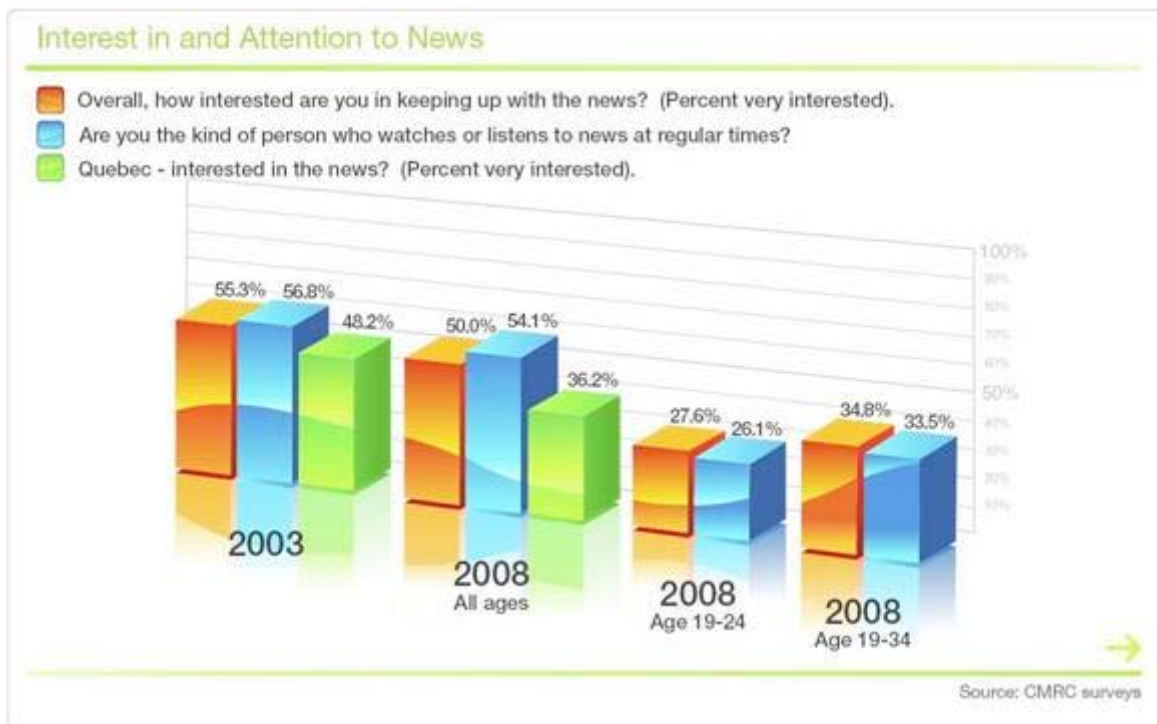
May 2008

Overview

In our first survey on audience attitudes toward the media – the first independent study of its kind in the country – we reported that the relationship between Canadians and their news media was not as bad as we thought. Canadians wanted Canadian news and they were slightly more positive in general than Americans around key measures of media credibility. This survey just completed, five years later, found significant, largely negative, changes in the relationship in a few key areas. The changes pose significant questions for traditional media in a digital environment with many more choices and forms of content. While there are many positives for traditional media, there are also deep concerns from the audience. The first section examines the two main problem areas that we identified: declining interest and increasing cynicism. We found a very sophisticated and fussy audience. The second section focuses on the upside of the changes taking place in the way people consume media. We also found evidence of increasing engagement and novel news habits among young people. This offers perhaps the greatest hope for conventional media in the future of news.

Interest and Attention to the News

Compared to our last survey, we found a general declining interest in the news.



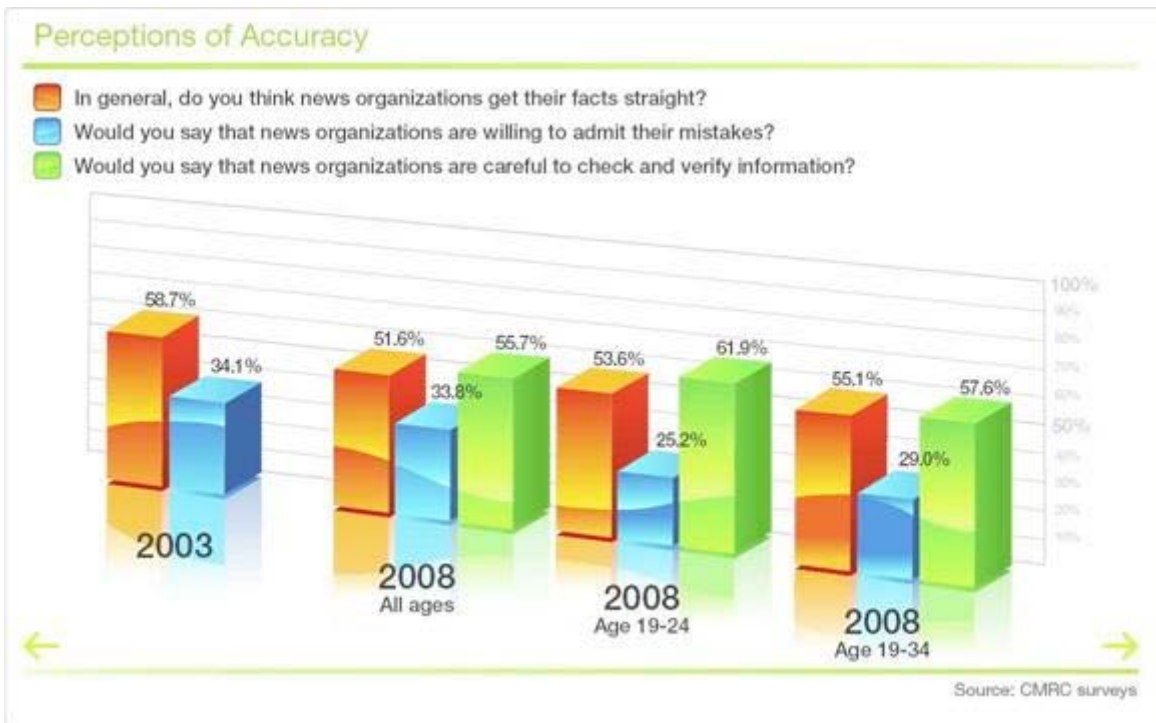
- Interest in news has declined slightly, with about half of Canadian adults very interested in keeping up with the news and nearly nine in 10 somewhat interested.
- Unfortunately, only about one-third of those under 35 is very interested.
- Note that interest in and attention to the news is dropping at a faster rate in Quebec than elsewhere in Canada. In Quebec between 2003 and 2008, those who were very interested dropped 12 percentage points; whereas in the rest of Canada, the loss was just slightly more than five percentage points.

- More than half of Canadians are currently regular news consumers, slightly less than in 2003.
- But younger Canadians are much more likely to check news sources from time to time than to make news consumption a habit.

OBSERVATION: the competition for the attention of those under 35-years-old remains a major challenge

Audience Perceptions

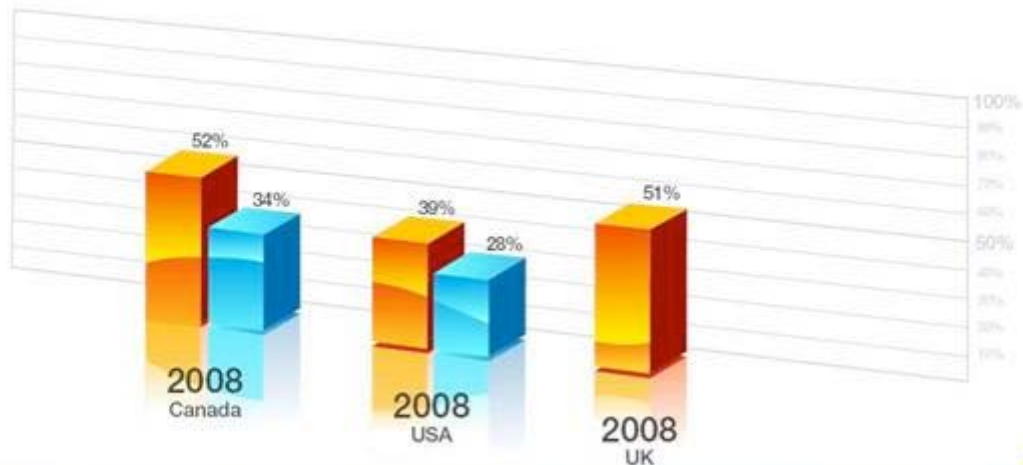
The second set of findings involves increasing criticism and or cynicism with respect to mainstream media that is reflected in consumption patterns. These are a number of slides that are responses to questions we asked about traditional media.



- The seven-percentage point decline in perceptions of accuracy over the past five years is statistically significant.
- Nearly half of those who have little interest in news think news media often fail to get their facts straight.
- Nearly two-thirds of Canadians believe that the news media cover up their mistakes.

Perceptions of Accuracy - International Comparisons

- In general, do you think news organizations get their facts straight? (all respondents)
- Would you say that news organizations are willing to admit their mistakes?

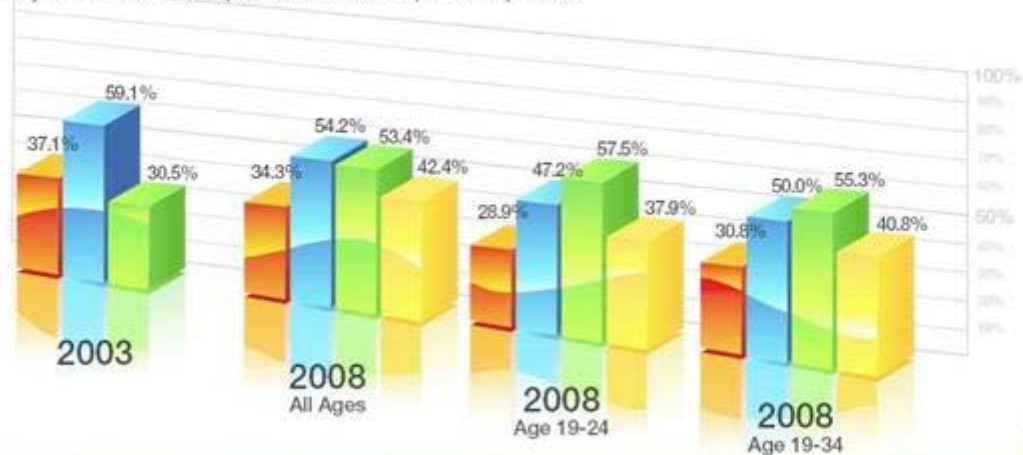


Source: CMRC surveys; Pew Centre for the People and the Press; GlobeScan Trust in Media Poll

- Canadians remain more positive than Americans about accuracy, but it is cold comfort to realize that 48 per cent in this country think that news stories are often inaccurate. That is a difficult starting point when you are trying to build trust or defend it.

Perceptions of Fairness and Balance

- Do you find news reporting to be fair and balanced – often?
- In the past few years, do you think maintaining fairness and balance has become a bigger problem in the media?
- Would you say that news organizations are politically biased in their reporting?
- Do you mistrust news reports that include reporters' opinions?

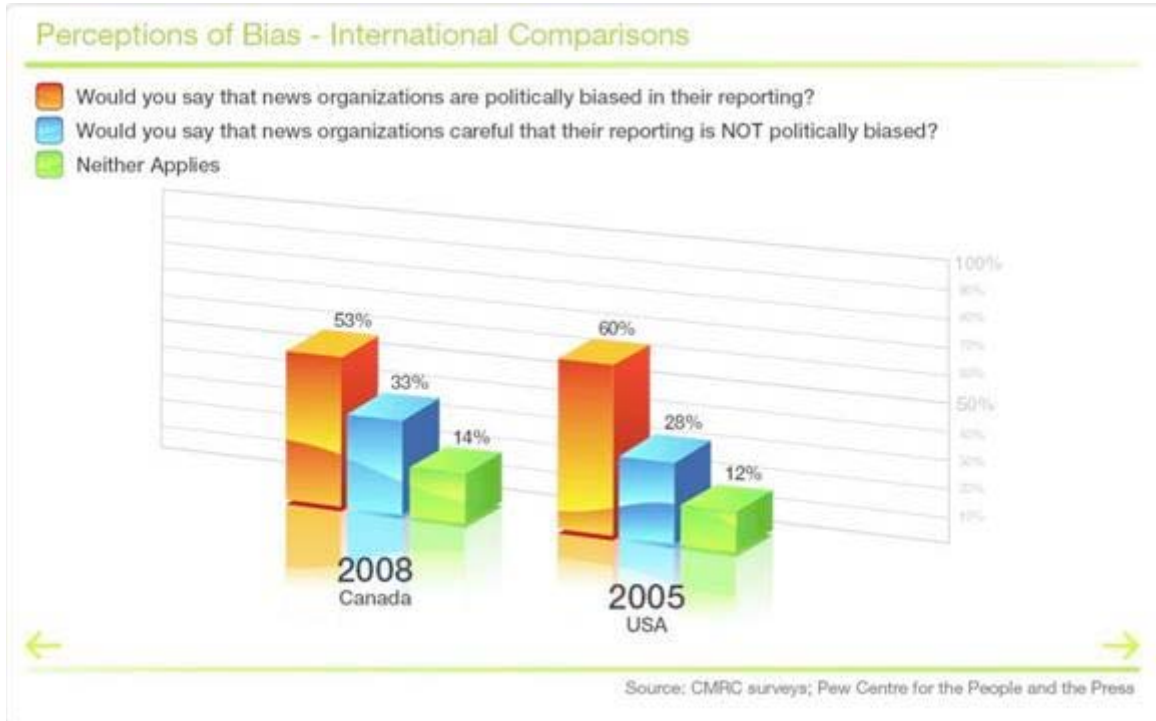


Source: CMRC surveys

- Only one in three Canadians thinks that the news is usually fair and balanced.
- About half think fairness and balance is a problem or is becoming more of a problem.
- Those who go online for news are more likely to think balance and fairness are problems.

- A majority agree that political bias is common in the news.
- Yet, a majority says they do not mistrust news reports that include reporters' opinions. Clearly, there has been a shift in what the audience will accommodate in reporting -- or what it has been conditioned to accept --- and that a new tolerance of opinion lies outside of conventional media practices of keeping opinions from reports.

OBSERVATION: the civics model of “objective” reporting is definitely not as influential as it was in the past.



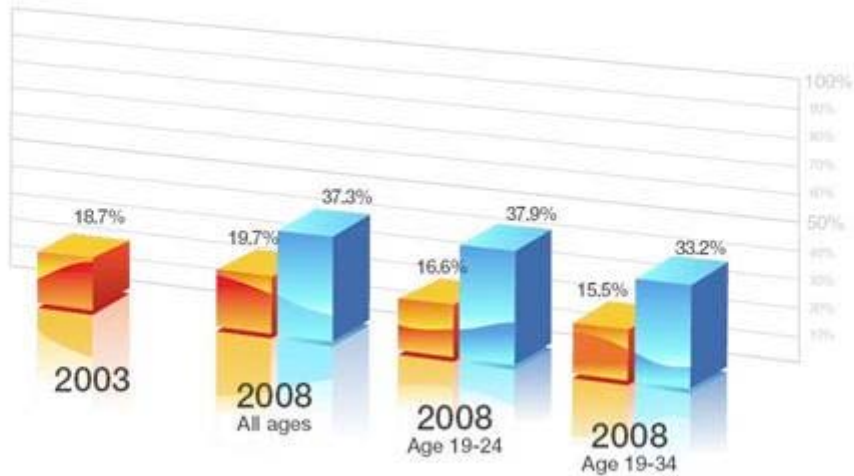
- Canadians are slightly less likely to perceive political bias in the news than Americans are.

Independence of News Organizations

When it comes to independence of news organizations and journalists, Canadians turn really skeptical, as the next charts show.

Independence of News Organizations / Journalists

- Agree that news media are mostly independent
- Agree that journalists are able to report the news freely, without interferences from owners

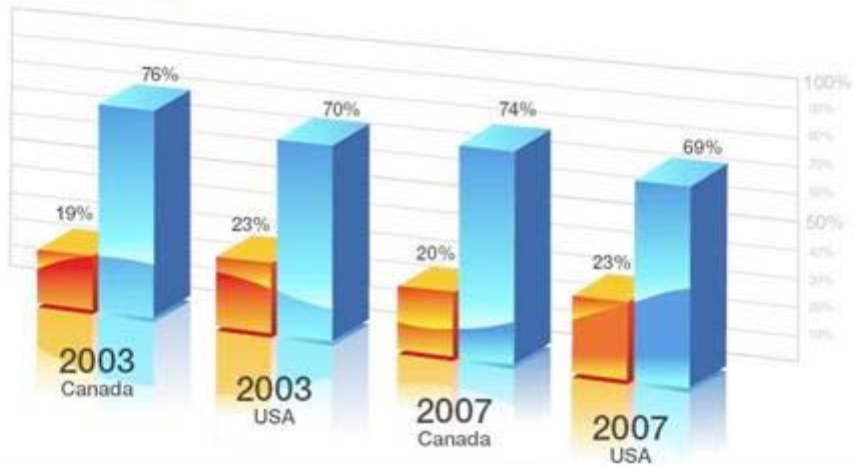


Source: CMRC surveys

Independence of News Organizations - International Comparisons

In general, do you think news organizations are mostly independent, or are they often influenced by powerful people and organizations?

- Mostly independent
- Influenced by people or organizations

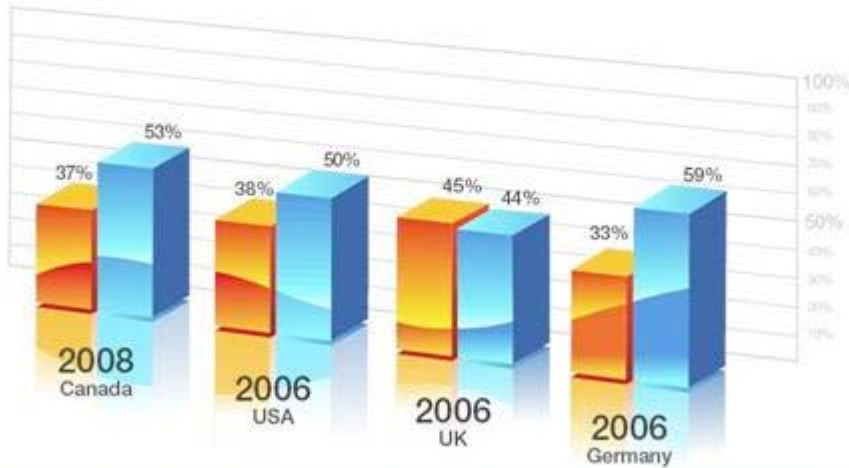


Source: CMRC surveys; Pew Centre for the People and the Press

Independence of Journalists - International Comparisons

In general, do you think journalists are able to report the news freely, without interferences from owners?

Agree Disagree

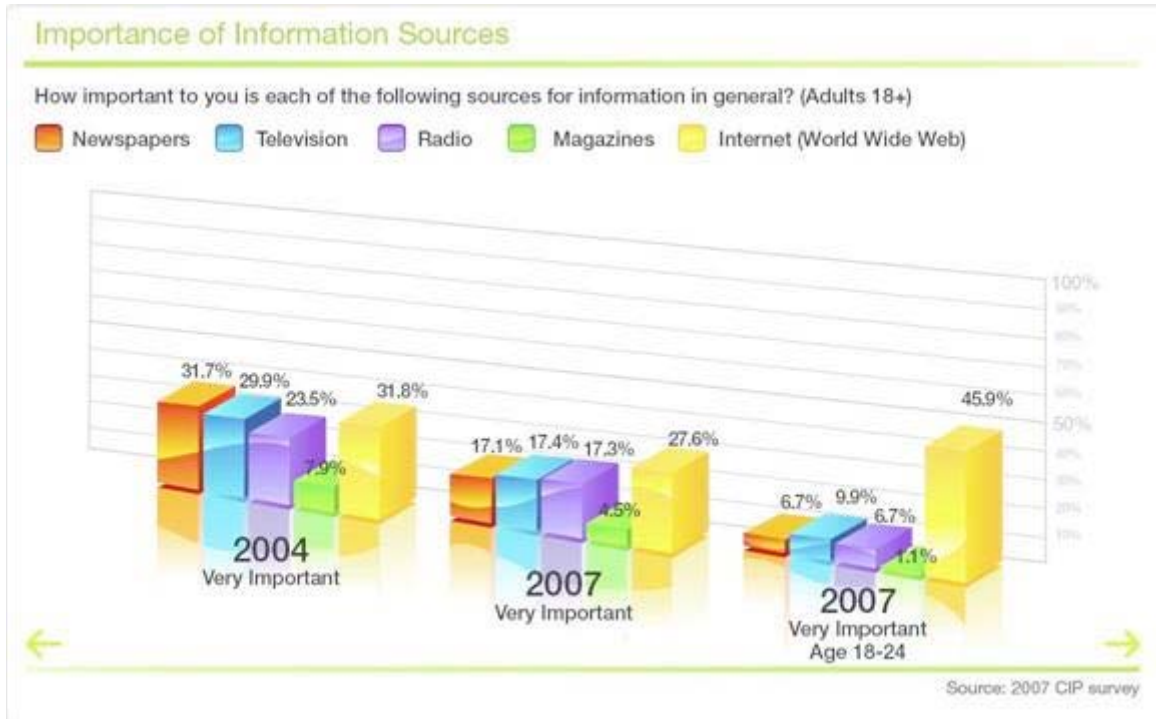


Source: CMRC surveys; GlobeScan Trust in Media Poll

- When we first did this survey back in 2003, this was one of the findings that surprised us -- that when it came to newsroom independence, Canadians were slightly more skeptical than Americans were. But that finding has been confirmed in our latest survey.
- We are even more skeptical than the British and the Americans when it comes to the independence of journalists, but as you can see, the Germans appear to be the most cynical.
- As you have seen, these four elements of credibility: accuracy, fairness and balance, independence of news organizations and independence of journalists are all trending downward, indicating a loss of faith in traditional media. This is true for both English and French-speaking Canadians, although Quebecers are slightly more positive than the rest of Canada on these measures.
- While the assumption has been that people are giving up on traditional media because of technology, our studies are showing there are other elements in play, which are driving consumers to seek other sources.

Importance of Information Sources


In the next table, we look at how consumers rate all the various media in terms of importance.

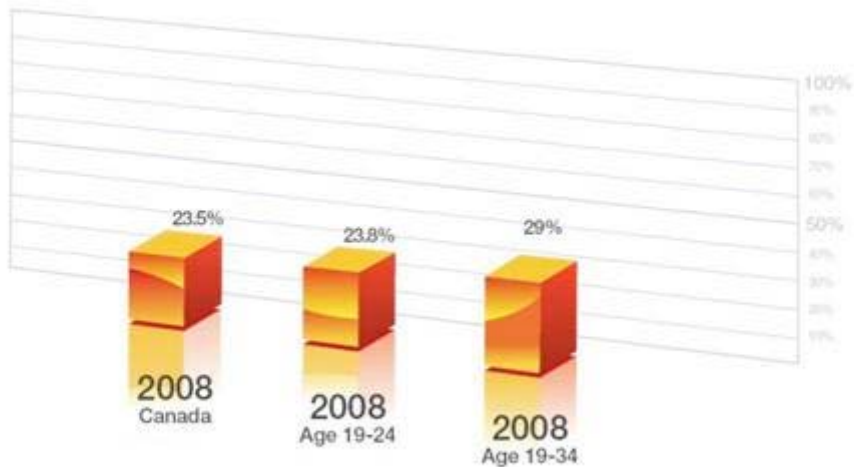


- This table shows the decline in percentage who perceives the traditional media as very important sources of information from 2004 to 2007 among all Canadians. The people who considered newspapers very important dropped by 14.6 percentage points between 2003 and 2007. Those who thought TV to be very important dropped by a similar amount: 12.5 percentage points.
- The really important difference is in 2007: between all Internet users (18+) and those in the 18-24 age group. The percentages who think the traditional media are very important sources of information for them are in single digits, whereas nearly 46 per cent see the Internet as very important.

What is interesting about these findings is that although we have known for some time that the lure of the Internet is causing mass defections from traditional media, we have not been as aware how much of this loss can be attributed to loss of faith or lack of trust. Look at these next two charts:

Response to Loss of Trust

 In the past year, I have stopped using a specific media source because it lost my trust.

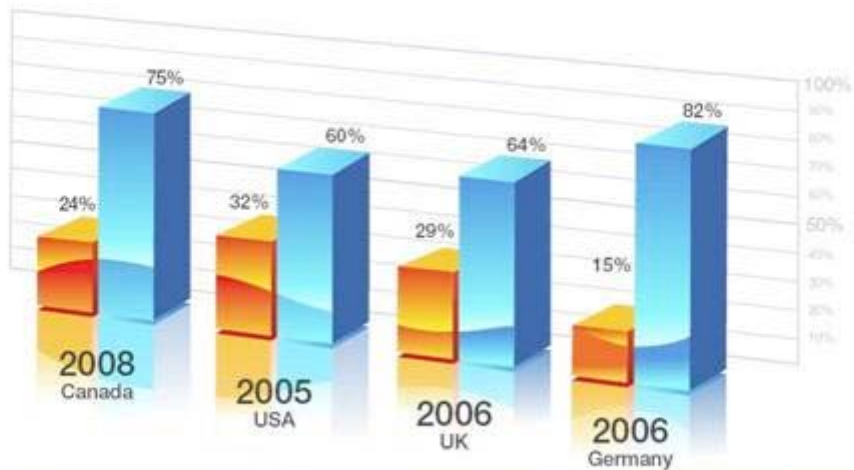


Source: 2008 CMRC survey

Response to Loss of Trust - International Comparisons

In the past year, I have stopped using a specific media source because it lost my trust.

 Agree  Disagree

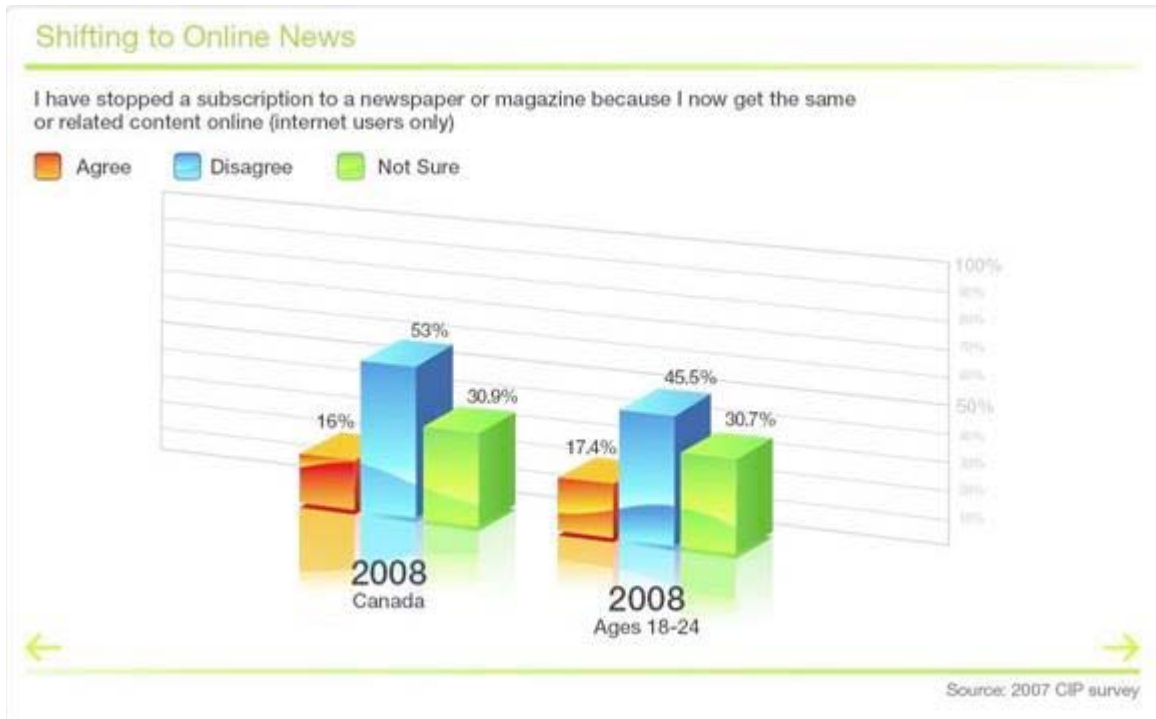


Source: 2008 CMRC survey

- Nearly one in three of those who check online news at least daily has stopped using a media source because of loss of trust. This is a significant number.
- More than one in three in the ethnic minority/third language group has stopped using a media source on grounds of loss of trust.
- These data suggest that quite a number of online news users are refugees from the mainstream media.

- The percentage that has rejected a news source on trust grounds is somewhat lower in Canada than in the US and UK, but it still seems to us astonishingly high.

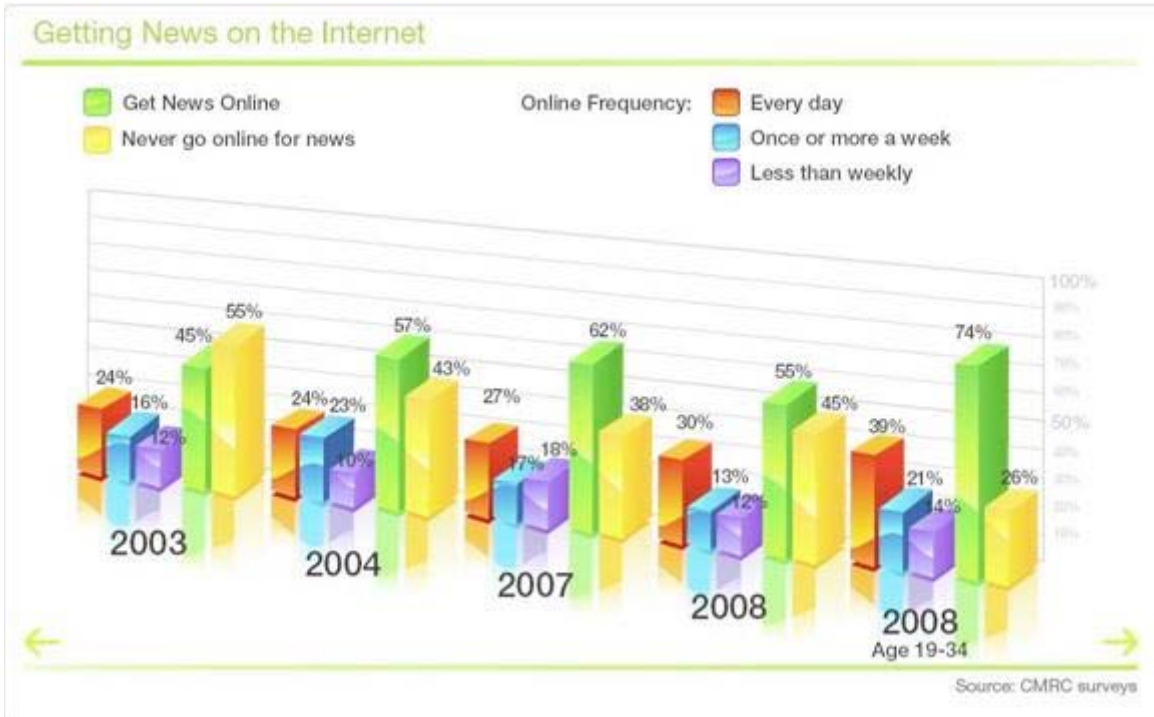
When we asked this question, using a related variable, that is, quitting traditional media because the same or related content was available online, the results offer further evidence of the importance of trust.



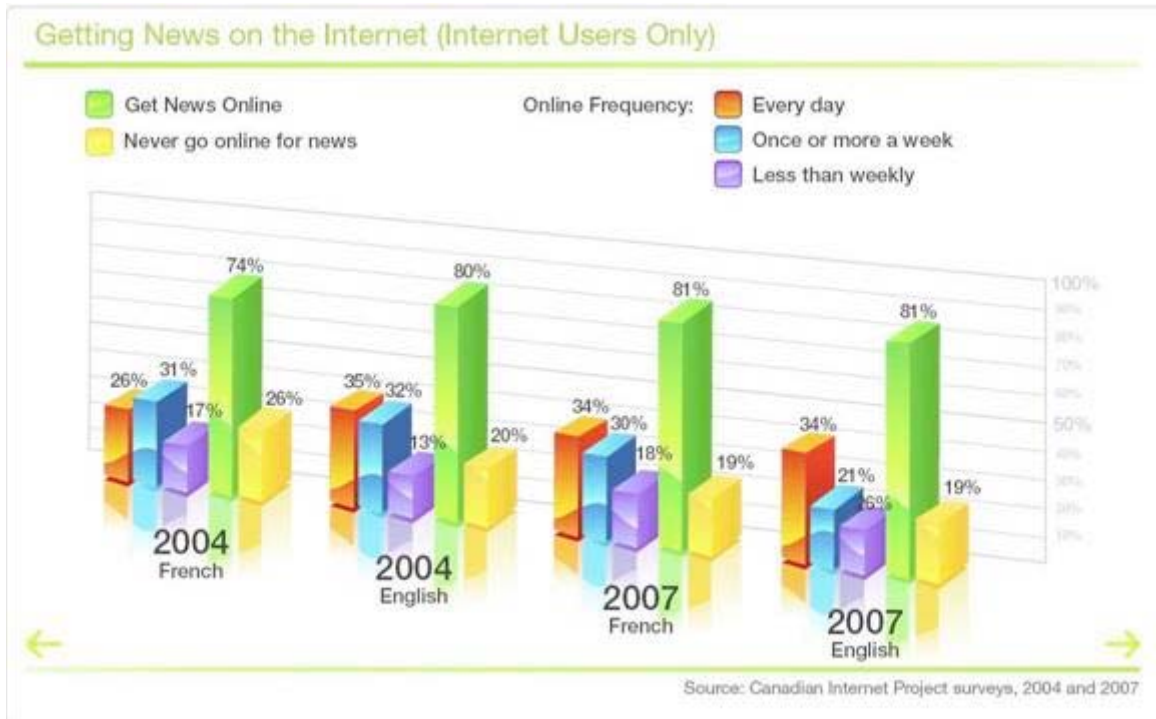
- You will note that loss of trust appears to be more important than easier access to content. The percentage of people who gave up on traditional media for reasons of convenience is overall 16 per cent, whereas the percentage that quit for reasons of trust is 24, eight points higher.
- Not surprisingly, we found that heavy Internet users (15+ hours per week) are more likely to have opted out of a more traditional news source (23.1%).

Online News

Now we turn to an examination of who is online for news and how frequently. Here is where the results start to get a bit more encouraging.



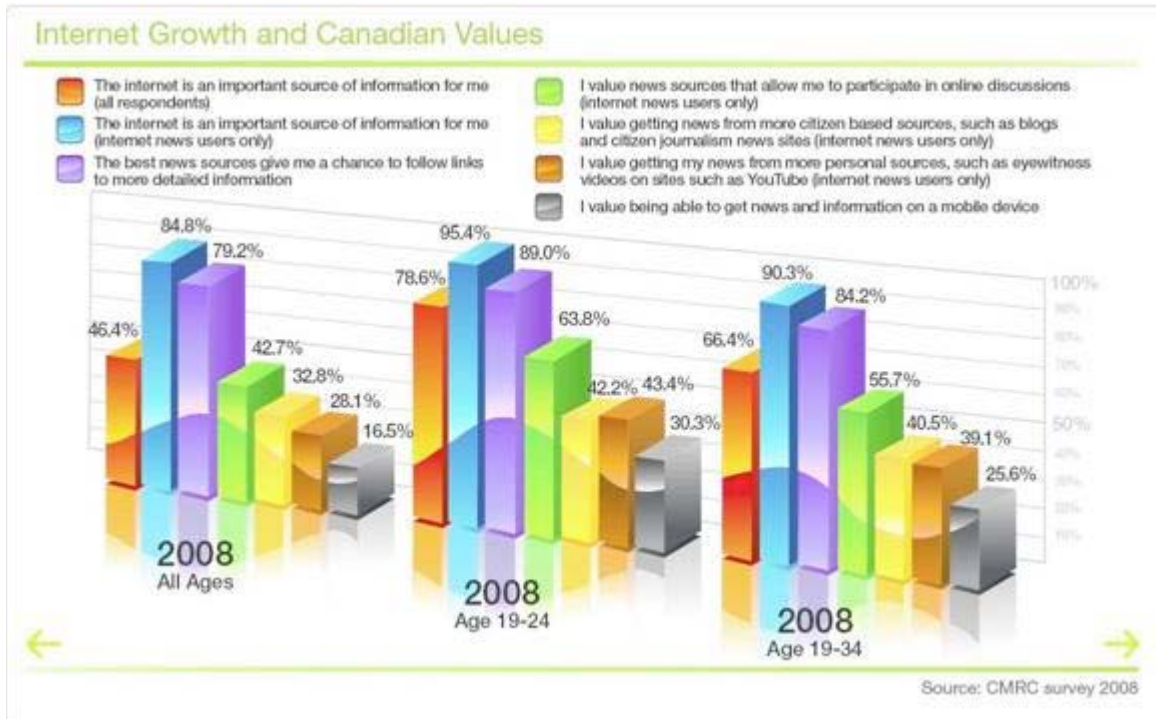
- The number of Canadians who go online for news increased by 12 percentage points between the two surveys and has since been relatively stable (the higher number in 2007 reflects the wording of the question).
- There has been a steady increase in those who seek news online everyday or more often. Currently, more than one Canadian in ten goes online for news several times a day.
- Nearly three in four Canadians in the 19-24 age group go online for news.
- The fact that the numbers are this high should be encouraging for the producers of news, provided that traditional operators have good websites and enough ad revenue to sustain them.



- As you would expect, the numbers getting news online is even higher among Internet users. The vast majority of Canadians who are currently using the Internet use it to get news (four in five). This is an encouraging number.
- Note that the percentage of francophones who get news online now is roughly equivalent to the rest of Canada, whereas in 2004, this was not the case. At that time, the percentage of Quebecers accessing news online was seven percentage points lower.
- However, the percentage of English users has not changed much since 2004, which to us is somewhat surprising.

Internet Audiences

Here is a chart explaining the attraction of online news and what Canadians value in online news sites.



- The appeal of online news lies in its immediacy, convenience (for those online), which you might expect but our survey also shows that a high percentage is lured by the opportunity to follow links to more detailed information. Nearly 80 per cent said this was part of the attraction and, among younger audiences, the number is even higher.
- Also valued, especially by younger users are the opportunity to participate in online discussions and access to non-traditional sources of news, information and commentary.
- The opportunity to get news on a mobile device is particularly popular among younger users and this one is obviously the hot new trend to watch.
- There are qualitative issues that attract an online news audience --- principally the depth that can be offered and the opportunities to interact and contribute.

Summary

These surveys show that traditional media have to be concerned, not only about the impact of technology on their audiences, but also by the impact that lack of credibility and trust are having. People clearly care about accuracy, about discipline, and about the commitment to quality, and if traditional players tamper with those principles, clearly the audience is prepared to make them pay a quick price. After all, there are choices as never before and the audience is more sophisticated than ever.

The audience cares enough to shop around. The Internet offers more choice and thus allows the news consumer to deal with some of their concerns about credibility and trust by finding sources they will support. What is not clear in any survey so far is whether the older trusted brands have significant security in the digital sphere. They may just have the pole position in the race.

The real key to success for traditional media could involve learning a new language --- the language of interactivity, of conversation, of engagement and involvement of the audience. It may also mean shedding the notion of reporting without opinions. If traditional media develop

websites that offer more than their print or broadcast product by building larger packages of content that include user-generated material, then the future may well be much brighter than many of us thought.

The Surveys

2003: Report Card on the Canadian Media

Telephone interviews of a representative national sample (N = 3011) of adults (19 years of age and older) were conducted in November-December 2003 on behalf of the CMRC by the Mustel Group. The margin of error for the national sample is +/- 2%. Details are available on the CMRC website

2004: Canada Online! A comparative analysis of Internet users and non-users in Canada and the world: Behaviour, attitudes and trends 2004.

Telephone interviews of a representative national sample (N = 3014) of adults (18 years of age and older) were conducted in May-June 2004 on behalf of the Canadian Internet Project (an initiative of the CMRC) by Research House, Toronto and CROP, Montreal. The margin of error for the national sample is +/- 2%. Details are available on the Canadian Internet Project website (www.cipic.ca).

2007: Canada Online Revisited

Telephone interviews of a representative national sample (N = 3037) of youth (12 to 17 years of age and adults (18 years of age and older) were conducted in July 2007 on behalf of the Canadian Internet Project by Research House. The margin of error for the national sample is +/- 2%. The full report of this survey will be published in June 2008. Details will be available on the CMRC website.

2008: Trust in the Canadian News Media

Telephone interviews of a representative national sample (N = 2011) of adults (19 years of age and older) were conducted in February 2008 on behalf of the CMRC by the Mustel Group. The margin of error for the national sample is +/- 2.2%. Details will be posted on the CMRC website.