

FACTUM

When Lies Have Legs: Majority of Canadians (56%) Have Been Fooled By At Least Some Form of Fake or Outdated Content Online

Most (61%) Think Public Concern About “Fake News” is *Excessive* Yet Many Have Difficulty Deciphering What Constitutes Fact

Toronto, Ontario, September 23, 2019 — A new Ipsos poll conducted on behalf of Historica Canada reveals that most (61%) Canadians feel there is *excessive* public concern over “fake news” despite many having trouble separating fact from opinion and a vast majority (88%) expressing concerns over the accuracy of information that is circulated online.

Even if there is a sense that concerns about “fake news” might be overblown, virtually all (94%) feel there is a need to seek out media coverage from a wide range of sources, particularly traditional ones (i.e., newspaper, radio, TV), which three in four (77%) Canadians view as more trustworthy than their online counterparts. Older adults (55+) are more likely to trust traditional media over online sources (88% vs. 71% under 55). Additionally, most (70%) *agree* that every source has a bias and there is no such thing as objective media coverage. And yet barely half (52%) say they *always* (15%) or *usually* (37%) seek out multiple perspectives on major news stories.

Just three in five are confident that they can *always* or *usually* determine the accuracy of online content (56%; 12% *always*; 44% *usually*), bias in news media (59%; 15% *always*; 44% *usually*) or read beyond the headline for a more thorough understanding of the topic in question (60%; 18% *always*; 43% *usually*). Atlantic Canadians are more likely to report reading beyond the headline (77% vs. 59% rest of Canada) to obtain a more thorough understanding of the topic in question.

Four in ten (41%) claim to seek out information on the historical context surrounding present-day issues that dominate news headlines, including majorities in Quebec (52%) and Atlantic Canada (56%), though only about one in three (36%) across all other provinces say do this. Men (at 49%) are more likely than women (33%) to say they seek out information on the historical context.

While compelling, the results should not take away from the fact that following the news and having a diverse range of media sources is clearly important to Canadians. Well over nine in ten (94%) actively follow the news and most profess to using both online (70%) as well as traditional media outlets (76%) as sources for news and information. In fact, as many as three in ten (30%) admit that the majority of their news consumption is now done through social media. Television continues to reign supreme, however, with two-thirds (62%) citing this traditional media outlet as their go-to for breaking news and information. As might be expected, younger adults (under 35) are more likely to use online sources (87% vs. 64%, 35+) and report that most of their news consumption is done through social media, specifically (57% vs. 20%, 35+). By contrast, usage of traditional media sources is highest among the 55+ demographic (89% vs. 68% under 55).

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The rise of social media and the Internet more generally as news sources can sometimes mean there is a grey area between what is real and fake, as anyone can easily disseminate information regardless of its accuracy. Indeed, nearly half (45%) of all Canadians report having corrected someone who shared online content that contained false information, a figure which climbs to nearly six in ten (57%) among the under 35 cohort (vs. 40% 35+).

To help curb such ambiguities, particularly for the next generation, the vast majority (86%) support making media literacy education a requirement for all students, with adults over 35 being among the most likely to support such initiatives (89% vs. 78% under 35). When asked which criteria they use to judge the legitimacy of a digital news source a plurality (49%) cite corroboration by other sources followed closely by staff qualifications (i.e., reporters, editors, etc.) (43%), whether or not it is a digital branch of a traditional media outlet (44%), who owns the media source (38%), how long it has existed (33%), and where they discovered the source (35%). Corroboration by other sources is especially important for older adults, with nearly three in five (57%) over the age of 55 mentioning this as a criterion (vs. 44% under 55) they would use.

There is clear divergence between the genders, in terms of how they judge the legitimacy of digital news sources. The length of time the source has existed matter more to men (37% vs. 29% of women), whereas the connection (or lack thereof) to traditional media (48% of women vs. 40% of men) and where the source was discovered (39% vs. 31%) are more frequently cited by women.

While most think public concern regarding fake news is *excessive*, many are contributing to its spread and transmission, perhaps without intending to. Over half (56%) report that they have been duped by at least some form of fake or outdated content online, with men (60% vs. 51% of women) and adults under 35 (74% vs. 49% 35+) being particularly susceptible to having done this. More specifically:

- Nearly four in ten (38%) admit to having read or shared content online that they believed was true and later found out was at least partially false;
- Around one in three have read or shared content thinking it was current and later found out it was outdated (33%) or have read or shared online content they believed to be true but later found out was satire or a joke (30%);
- One quarter (26%) have shared images (i.e., memes, infographics, etc.) on social media without checking to see if the facts presented were true.

Canadians Overestimate Their Ability to Differentiate Between Fact & Opinion

At seven in ten (69%), most Canadians are confident they can *always* (21%) or *usually* (48%) differentiate between an opinion piece and a news article. But perhaps Canadians overestimate themselves, as when shown a list of six statements many struggle to separate the facts from opinions.

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Just twelve percent (12%) are able correctly identify, in every case, which of the six statements are factual, and which are subjective. Only two-thirds (63%) correctly identify at least three, and as many as five percent (5%) can't even get one right. Canadians under the age of 55 are more discerning than their older counterparts, as they are much more likely to correctly identify at least four of the six statements as being opinion or fact (45% vs. 33%, 55+).

Below is a list of the correct answers, and a breakdown of responses:

Opinion Statements

- The vast majority (85%) correctly indicate that the statement: *pizza should never include pineapple as a topping* represents an opinion, not a fact. One in ten (10%) believe it is a factual statement while six percent (6%) appear to be stumped, indicating that they don't know enough to provide an answer one way or another.
- Although a plurality (41%) correctly identify the statement: *The Battle of Vimy Ridge was the most important moment in Canadian history* as representing an opinion, a majority thinks it's either a fact (33%) or were unsure (26%). Older adults (55+) are less likely to correctly identify this statement as an opinion (30% vs. 47%, under 55).
- At two in five (42%), a plurality can't tell if the statement: *electing Wilfrid Laurier proved Canadians had embraced the idea of Canada as a bilingual nation* is opinion or fact. The good news is that those who provide a definitive answer are twice as likely to correctly identify the statement as an opinion (39%), rather than a fact (19%).

Factual Statements

- Barely a majority (54%) recognize it's a fact that *the Montreal Canadiens have won more Stanley Cups than any other team in the NHL*. While just one in ten (10%) erroneously think this is an opinion, almost four in ten (36%) say they can't determine the answer.
- Just three in five (58%) correctly identify as fact that entrepreneur Viola Desmond is the new face of the \$10 bill. The vast majority of the remaining four in ten say they don't know enough to offer a response (34%), leaving just eight percent (8%) who claim it's an opinion.
- One in six (16%) think stating that Hawaiian pizza was invented in Canada reflects an opinion. Less than four in ten (38%) are aware that it is a fact, while a plurality (46%) admit they are unsure whether this represents a fact or opinion. Adults under 55 are statistically more likely to correctly identify this as a factual statement (43% vs. 29%, 55+).

About the Study



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These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted between August 23rd and 26th, 2019, on behalf of Historica Canada. For this survey, a sample of 1,000 Canadians were interviewed. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the Canadian population according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll is accurate to within ± 3.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all Canadians been polled. The credibility interval will be wider among subsets of the population. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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