

The 18-24 Age Group and the News

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Presentation

MANDATE

The Canadian Media Research Consortium and the Centre d'études sur les médias gave INRS, Urbanisation, Culture et Société a mandate to study the relationship that Canadians aged 18 to 24 have to the social and political information disseminated by the media.

* * *

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The desire to learn more about the subject stems from questions raised by statistical data on media consumption and research on young people and the media. The work we consulted allows only a limited understanding and points up the lack of data on young people and information from the standpoint of a Canada-wide comparative analysis. This research is designed to address this deficiency by extending our knowledge of several aspects of the relationship that people 18 to 24 have to information. The three main aspects we analyzed are practices, representations of the media and integration of information, which are discussed in a separate chapter.

The examination of practices concerns media use. The respondents were asked about the current events that attract

their attention, the sources they use to obtain information, the reasons for their choices and the daily habits they have developed. We also took this opportunity to ask what “being informed” means for today’s young people and whether the respondents perceive themselves as well informed and whether they believe their generation is well informed.

Representations of the media refer to the image that people aged 18 to 24 have of the media. We analyzed various aspects, such as quality of media coverage and content, information format, role of the media and young people’s degree of trust in information sources, namely individual journalists and the media as institutions.

Finally, integration of information refers to the way the respondents assimilate information and incorporate it into their daily habits and cultural practices. This aspect involved mainly exploring the impact that information has on their lives and analyzing the competencies of individuals and the expertise of the media in the integration process.

* * *

DATA COLLECTION

The issues presented by the research indicated that qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews was appropriate. This research method does not allow us to generalize regarding the 18-24 cohort, since the sample is not statistically representative of the target population. Rather, it is conducive to in-depth exploration in a context in which knowledge of the subject is limited. In this study, the first objective was to gain a better understanding of the relationship that people aged 18 to 24 have to information. We therefore had to ensure the participants offered diverse socio-demographic characteristics so as to achieve a certain degree of data saturation and to cover a wide range of attitudes. The content analysis then allowed us to determine convergences and divergences from the discussions.

The following variables were selected for the composition of the sample: sex, age (18 to 24), occupation (student, employed,

unemployed), level of education (secondary, college, university), place of residence (living for at least 10 years in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver, three large urban areas that are distant from one another) and language spoken (English or French). The selection of the participants also took into account their interest in information and the degree to which they said they were informed about events in Canada and elsewhere in the world. Despite the efforts made to attract young people who consider themselves poorly informed or uninformed, very few responded.

Seventeen interviews were conducted with a total of 70 respondents: 18 in Vancouver, 21 in Toronto and 31 in Montreal. The interviews took the form of focus groups, generally involving five individuals, although adjustments had to be made several times depending on the number of participants taking part in the interview. The advantage of this data-collection method is that it is conducive to interaction between participants and fosters social and collective thought processes. Despite the positive aspects, the expression of personal opinions was occasionally accentuated or diminished within a group, depending on individual skills and the influence of the group leader. This was clear in one of the discussion groups.

* * *

RESEARCH FINDINGS

From the outset, it is important to note that there is no “young person” but only “young people” in that today’s youth are heterogeneous, although they have values, attitudes and behaviours that set them apart from older generations. The findings show a diversity on many aspects. We found, to cite only a few examples, varied user profiles and diversity in terms of intensity of use, sources of information and the definition of what it means to “be informed” and what good media content is. As a result, no simple solution can be applied to all young people to ensure they make greater use of the traditional media, since their practices are based on personal motivation and individual time constraints.

The research has made it possible to verify two assumptions formed on the basis of the research consulted: a lack of interest on the part of the 18-24 cohort in political and social information and possible use of means other than the media to obtain information. The first assumption has been invalidated, since the respondents expressed the need to be informed about current events, with social, political and environment issues cited most often. Their level of interest varies, but it stems from social pressure that encourages them, at the very least, to keep up with daily events so that they can take part in everyday conversations at school, at work, at home and with peers.

The findings confirm the second assumption, namely that integration of information often occurs through sociability and socialization, rather than only through the media. Although the role played by school in the socialization of young people is better known, it could be increased since young people will increasingly need knowledge and skills to grasp the complex realities that characterize the openness to the world that the media foster. As for sociability as a means of integration, recourse to peers, family members or professors deemed reliable as well as to experts in a given area is a common strategy that not only puts them on the alert for daily news but also enriches their knowledge and enables them to compare ideas, to develop opinions and to argue convincingly. Moreover, sociability is a source of motivation in a context in which it is important for them to be able to take part in conversations.

The main points of our many research findings are as follows. First, free access is an important factor in media use. Such opportunities are abundant in everyday life; for instance, the marketing strategies of certain media are to distribute free newspapers in Montreal and Toronto¹. Frequent use of this printed material by many respondents in these two cities shows the appeal of any free media source.

Another aspect of note is the respondents' versatile use of media in an information market that offers many ways to obtain information. They are very enthusiastic about the Internet, which

1. Such free newspapers have been distributed in Vancouver after this research has been completed.

offers a panoply of local and foreign information sources. Moreover, many are reluctant to pay for printed matter when free information can be had electronically. Despite the popularity of the electronic medium, a large number of respondents still consult traditional media in electronic format while turning to alternative media for supplementary information. Others are increasingly using alternative sources, however.

Another research finding that deserves special attention is the respondents' mistrust of information and media, whether they live in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver. Their mistrust is due to the bias they perceive in information content, such as subjectivity in news reporting, partial content that does not present all aspects of an issue and content that is devoid of diversified viewpoints or that serves as a means of persuasion. This negative representation is aggravated by the private or government interests that control information and by concentrated media ownership, which affects the content and the sources they choose in order to learn about events in Canada and elsewhere in the world.

The convergence points in the respondents' comments are numerous, although they do not stem from homogeneity in their practices, representation or integration of information. Despite the more pronounced presence of similarities between the groups of respondents, a few points of divergence were also observed. The respondents from Toronto and Vancouver are more dissatisfied with Canadian and local coverage; for example, the first group deplores undue emphasis on local events while the second objects to excessive coverage of the United States. As for the Montreal respondents, they are distinguished by their mistrust of the Quebec media's political partisanship (federalist or sovereigntist) and its impact on media coverage. This research does not pretend to have determined all the differences in attitude and behaviour that may exist between the three groups. Some may have been overshadowed by the scope of the research, which covered many aspects.

The research findings yield elements that provide a better understanding of the relationship of young Canadians to the social and political information provided by the media. They form the basis for research that could take this exploration

further or use a survey, for example, to verify the extent to which the findings are representative of the 18-24 cohort.

In this report, the analysis is backed by respondents' remarks, with many quotations serving as illustrations. These comments are the exact words used by the respondents, who generously took part in the exercise, and we are most grateful to them.

[Translation] Especially since we use the Internet with such ease, we're the Internet generation, we were born with it. We can really get a great deal of information from it, and that's a big help when you want complete information² (Montreal, 18-year-old woman).

I don't think there's a problem with getting information, the information is easier to get today than it's ever been before. But it's like covering an issue is not a problem, but correctly covering it, that's what the problem is. In an unbiased fashion, that's what's lacking (Vancouver, 21-year-old man).

So I would read the newspaper or something on the Internet, and I would take the common points from those and match it with something on the TV (Toronto, 23-year-old woman).

2. «Surtout avec la facilité que l'on a d'utiliser Internet, on est la génération Internet, on est nés là-dedans. On peut vraiment aller chercher énormément d'information là-dedans et cela aide beaucoup pour avoir l'information complète».

Research mandate

The Canadian Media Research Consortium and the Centre d'études sur les médias gave INRS, Urbanisation, Culture et Société a mandate to study the relationship that young Canadians aged 18 to 24 have to information.

Questions are being raised about the future of the traditional media, which are faced with strong competition on a diversified market, as a result of existing media sources and the nature of the information disseminated. These concerns have been raised partially by statistics on media consumption, which generally indicate lower participation rates for young adults than for the other age groups, especially for television viewing and newspaper readership. As for the print media, the loss of readership is especially dramatic, since it is accelerating over time and from one cohort to another.

The main objective of this research is to study young adults and their interest in information so as to verify whether their apparent lack of interest in the social and political information disseminated by the media is real and also to explore their representations of the media.

Introduction

A series of articles published recently in *The Globe and Mail* on the “New Canada” outlines changes and trends in Canadian society and their impact on the values of young adults in their twenties. Trends in such areas as education, family, work and relationships with institutions constitute the general framework for the new lifestyles and values of these young people (Anderssen, 2003; Valpy, 2003; Saunders, 2003).

These profound changes are accompanied by changes in the use of certain media. Statistics show that fewer people are reading newspapers, and that young adults are generally less interested in social and political information. Have young Canadians aged 18 to 24 dissociated themselves from the information conveyed by the traditional media? Are there provincial differences in the nature and scope of this decline? As some research shows, age-specific characteristics that are grounded in the current youth culture appear to play a role in young people’s relationship with the media. No medium, not even television, which may have taken up a large portion of their free time during childhood and adolescence, can compete with the importance that young people place on friendship and relationships with peers as they begin their adult life (Boily, Duval, Gauthier, 2000). A portion of the information they receive may even be conveyed through conversation “I saw..., I heard..., I read....” This observation does not invalidate the relevance of another line of inquiry: are the media, as a result of their content and form, partially

responsible for the declining interest in the information media, especially the print media? This study tries to answer these questions from the standpoint of young adults themselves.

The first chapter reviews the literature on use and representation of the information media as well as on integration of information by young adults, from the existing data on this subject. These studies have raised many questions and served to orient our research issues and methodology. Since very few studies have been done on this subject for young Canadian adults as a whole, it was necessary to perform exploratory qualitative research focusing on young adults in the 18-24 age group in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. The research covered the following aspects: young people's use of the media; what they think of the media and the information disseminated; how they define «being informed» and whether they consider themselves informed; and the way they integrate information.

The research findings are given in chapters 2, 3 and 4, which cover respectively the respondents' practices, representations of the media and integration of information. Comparisons between these three research areas are made as the analysis is developed, since the behaviours and attitudes observed show a limited number of significant differences, which are too few to be isolated in a separate chapter. The conclusion presents the main research findings and related commentary.

CHAPTER 1

Presentation of research

LITERATURE REVIEW

The main aspects determined from the literature have been classified on the basis of the three main categories developed by Pons, Piette, Giroux and Millerand in their study of young people and the Internet. These main categories are use, representation and integration, which, for the purposes of this research, we have applied to the use of various media. Use is defined as real conditions of use by young people (type of use, frequency, duration, place, monitoring, conditions of access, context of use), representation is defined as the image, and integration as the degree and type of integration into the life habits and the cultural practices of young people (1999, [on line]).

Use of the media

A study by Ipsos World Monitor shows that, throughout the world, people in the 18-34 age group are less inclined than their elders to follow the news (Table 1).

TABLE 1
People who always follow the news (12 countries)³, 2002

	18-34 %	35-54 %	55 or over %
All	39	53	64
North America	38	50	66
Europe	42	58	69
Asia Pacific	32	50	53
Other	54	60	53

Source: Ipsos World Monitor, 2002: 44.

This finding does not provide any details on whether this declining interest affects all media equally. The following sections present data broken down as a function of each source of information starting with the closest: the relationship to the media of young Quebecers, young Canadians – when data are available – and occasionally young North Americans – when documentation is available in English or French.

Newspapers and magazines

Various surveys, such as those conducted by Quebec's Ministère de la Culture et des Communications (Boily, 2000: 53-54) and NADbank, show that the 18-24 age group reads newspapers the least. The 25-34 age group, however, presents frequency behaviour similar to that of the 18-24 age group. The shift is seen mainly between the 25-34 age group and their elders. These studies are fragmentary, however, and their conclusions are open to discussion, since the methodologies differ. For instance, surveys such as those conducted by NADbank use several indicators, such as "read yesterday." Others, such as those by the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, instead qualify user behaviour (read often, very often), which does not offer the same degree of precision.

3. The question asked was: *Do you always, usually, sometimes, rarely or never follow the news to keep up with current events?* The data in the table represent the percentage of those who answered *always*. Europe includes France, Germany, urban Russia and the United Kingdom. Asia Pacific includes China, urban India, Japan and South Korea. Other includes urban Brazil and urban South Africa.

The NADbank data show that in Canada people in the 18-24 age group, along with the 25-34 age group, form the cohort that read newspapers the least over the past five years. They slightly exceeded the rate for the 25-34 age group in 2004, however. It should also be noted that the drop in newspaper reading is constant for all age groups, but that it is more pronounced for the 18-24 age group (Table 2).

TABLE 2
Newspaper reading by age group, 1998-2004, Canada, %

	1998	1999	2000 to 2002	2003	2004
18 and over	60	59	54	54	53
18-24	56	53	45	45	45
25-34	52	52	47	45	44
35-49	59	60	54	54	52
50-64	66	67	62	61	60
65 and over	65	64	62	62	62

* Includes those who read a newspaper yesterday, during the week.
Source: NadBank data for 1998, 1999, 2000-2002, 2003, 2004.

As for Quebec, in 1979, 73.6 % of the 18-24 age group said they read newspapers often or very often. In 2004, this figure had fallen to 57.6 % (Table 3). If these data seem high in comparison with those for Canada as a whole, we must consider first whether the difference may be due to cultural factors, which are found in other behaviours, such as television viewing. We must then take into consideration the research methodology, which is not always possible in the case of surveys.

In addition, the same data indicate that people in the 18-24 age group are more partial than their elders to magazines, with the exception of 2004, which saw a significant drop that made them the smallest proportion of readers. Although they usually read magazines on sports, leisure, the outdoors, decor and the arts, their preferences also include magazines on current affairs, public affairs and news (Séguin, 2000: 19).

TABLE 3
**Proportion of readers of newspapers and magazines
 by age group, Quebec, 1979-2004***

Year	Medium	15-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55 or over	Total
1979	Newspapers	**	73.6	72.7	78.9	80.6	75.2	75.8
	Magazines	**	62.2	60.0	56.9	52.6	44.7	55.2
1983	Newspapers	71.9	69.2	68.5	73.7	79.4	72.1	72.0
	Magazines	78.9	62.6	57.4	57.9	53.7	47.8	57.3
1989	Newspapers	71.1	74.6	74.7	78.3	79.4	80.9	77.3
	Magazines	71.7	62.2	64.5	63.8	54.6	54.1	60.6
1994	Newspapers	67.4	76.9	71.1	76.4	84.4	77.9	76.5
	Magazines	78.5	73.5	66.8	59.5	62.0	59.6	64.2
1999	Newspapers	56.6	66.2	66.6	68.9	74.6	77.5	70.9
	Magazines	63.2	59.4	52.7	57.1	55.5	53.1	55.5
2004	Newspapers	46.6	57.6	57.7	64.2	71.5	73.7	65.5
	Magazines	56.3	48.0	52.8	54.2	55.5	52.8	52.9

* People who said they read a newspaper or magazines fairly often or very often.

** Data not available.

Source: Boily, Duval and Gauthier, 2000, p. 53-54 for 1977-1999. Special compilation for 2004. Data of the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications. Survey of cultural practices in Quebec, files for 1979, 1983, 1989, 1994, 1999 and 2004.

The study of the 18-24 age group and the media (Boily, 2000) shows that young people do not exhibit purchase behaviour; access to newspapers, and even magazines, often depends on opportunities that arise in everyday life (family, friends, restaurants, etc.). This behaviour may also explain their lower rate of newspaper readership. One of the challenges facing newspaper owners is to foster consumer behaviour on the part of young adults as regards newspapers. Major American newspapers have taken initiatives to reach young readers more effectively. For example, the *Chicago Tribune* has launched *RedEye*, a newspaper specifically for the 18-34 age group. So far, the target clientele is reluctant to pay the 25-cent cover price, however (Madore, 2003 [on line]).

This type of initiative taken in the United States reflects increasing concern about falling newspaper readership among

young adults (Readership Institute, 2002 [on line]). Three studies whose findings are discussed by Wilkinson point up this concern:

While “yesterday” readership among 18- to 34-year-olds declined steadily from 51 percent in 1991 to 39 percent in 1997, the same measure plummeted in a two-year period from 39 percent in 1999 to 26 percent in 2001, according to MORI research [...] NAA’s 2000 Media Usage Study revealed sharp displacement among 18- to 34-year-olds away from newspapers and television as news sources toward the Internet, especially after 1997 [...] While declines in youth readership have been a staple of research, Scarborough reports the most dramatic decreases in daily readership among 18- to 24-year-olds after 1998 – from more than 43 percent that year to 39 percent only three years later (Wilkinson, 2002 [on line]).

The Newspaper Association of America has been monitoring newspaper readership trends since 1967. Although almost 76 % of the population read newspapers in 1967, this figure had fallen to only 55 % in 2002. Of that group, people in the 18-24 cohort read newspapers the least, and their behaviour is very different from that of 1967, when almost 73 % of young people read newspapers. These figures have caused American researchers to question the belief that this non-user behaviour on the part of young people diminishes as they age, since the young cohorts are maintaining their behaviour as they get older (Newspaper Association of America, 2003 [on line]).

Statistically speaking, there is consensus in the academic community that newspapers will cease to be a product consumed daily within the next 70 years. The primary driver of this trend is our growing inability to attract young people in sufficient numbers... and maintain their loyalty frequencies of readership over long periods of time (Wilkinson, 2002 [on line]).

These researchers are also seeing a substantial drop in newspaper readership in the previous cohorts. What accounts for this drop? Another behaviour may have taken the place of reading newspapers, namely watching television. A study does indeed show an increase in television viewing in American society early

in the 1970s (Putnam, 1995). It may be that, in seeking information, people have turned to this medium, which has contributed to the decrease in newspaper readership. With respect to the younger generations more specifically, we must bear in mind that half of the people in the 18-24 age group present the specific characteristics of a student lifestyle (Séguin, 2000). Professional and residential stability is in their distant future, a situation that is not conducive to loyalty behaviour such as taking out a subscription. This may explain the mentality of the young people in this age group, who tend not to purchase newspapers and magazines, although this does not mean they don't take the opportunity to read them when it arises.

Television

As shown by the data in Table 4, the rate of television viewing is lower for the 18-24 age group than for the older groups, in Canada as a whole as well as in the provinces of Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia, where the largest cities are found. Women aged 18-24 watch television more than men of the same age. Young men in Ontario watch television the least, and young women in British Columbia watch it the most. This lack of interest in television for the 18-24 group as a whole results, at least in Quebec, in low viewership of newscasts. The evening news programs on the three general French-language networks attract only 13 % of the 18-24 age group, versus 31 % of the population as a whole. Taking into account television viewing when news programs are on the air, however, we see that two-thirds of young adults selected a newscast instead of another program, in comparison with 82 % for adults as a whole (BBM surveys, 2003, data in Appendix 1).

TABLE 4
**Number of hours of television viewing
 per week in Canada and the provinces of Quebec, Ontario and
 British Columbia, fall 2003**

Age group	Canada		Quebec		Ontario		British Columbia	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
18-24	11.1	15.5	12.2	16.0	9.7	14.7	13.1	17.6
25-34	15.9	22.1	17.3	21.7	15.2	21.8	12.0	23.0
35-49	18.2	23.8	20.0	25.5	17.3	24.6	15.7	20.6
50-59	22.7	28.4	24.9	32.4	20.1	26.0	26.0	29.5
60 or over	33.0	35.1	35.1	41.6	31.9	30.8	37.2	36.4

Source: Statistics Canada Television Viewing Databank 2003;

Television viewing: data tables, March 2005, no. 87F0006XIE in the catalogue.

In addition, Radio-Canada's two public affairs programs *Enjeux* and *Zone libre* attract more young adults than do the network's newscasts. The two programs even succeed in attracting almost as large a share of the 18-24 age group as they do of all age groups. *Zone libre* often presents analyses of what is happening in the world, whereas *Enjeux* regularly covers social issues (BBM surveys, 2003, Appendix 1). Both are explanatory programs that provide more analysis of events and facts than a straight newscast. Radio-Canada's newscasts place a great deal of emphasis on official or institutional information (National Assembly, House of Commons, United Nations, large corporations, lobby groups, etc.). It may be that young adults are more interested in learning about and understanding what their fellow citizens in Canada and elsewhere are experiencing rather than watching brief newscasts devoid of commentary.

Radio

The 18-24 cohort also listens to the radio less often than the older age groups, for Canada as a whole and in the provinces of Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia (Table 5). Frequency according to sex is similar for the 18-24 cohort, except in British Columbia. We can conclude, however, that people aged 18-24 listen mainly to music stations that offer very little social or political information (Boily, 2000). As for the radio networks of

the CBC-SRC, which present more information (international, national, provincial and local news), they seem to attract very few listeners in the 18-24 age group. Data on SRC's French-language morning shows in Quebec City and Ottawa-Hull show that the proportion of young adults who prefer them to other stations is negligible: 3 % in Ottawa-Hull and 0.5 % in Quebec City (BBM survey, 2003, Appendix 1).

TABLE 5

Number of hours of radio listening per week in Canada and in the provinces of Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia, fall 2004

Age group	Canada		Quebec		Ontario		British Columbia	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
18-24	15.5	15.9	14.6	14.7	15.7	16.0	13.3	16.0
25-34	20.7	17.9	21.9	18.5	19.6	17.7	17.4	16.4
35-49	22.2	20.8	22.5	22.6	22.5	21.0	20.0	18.1
50-64	21.7	22.1	21.5	22.8	22.5	22.2	20.1	19.8
65 or over	20.8	23.6	20.8	23.3	21.4	24.4	18.5	22.7

Source: Statistics Canada Radio Listening Databank 2004:

Radio listening: data tables, July 2005, no. 87F0007XIE in the catalogue.

Thus there are substantial differences in the use of traditional information media by the various age groups. We might conclude from this finding that young adults seem less interested in daily information that tends to focus on official events. But is that the case?

Internet

The decrease in information obtained from the mainstream media is often associated with greater use of the Internet as a source of information (Wilkinson, 2002 [on line]). While use of the traditional media is decreasing, use of the Internet for news and information has been rising for several years.

From a Statistics Canada report, whose findings are given in a document prepared jointly by the Université de Montréal and the University of Calgary, we see that the Internet detracts from time devoted to other cultural and social practices: 27 % of In-

ternet users watch television less, 15 % spend less time reading books, magazines and newspapers, and 17 % interact less with friends and family (InterNet Consulting Group, 2001 [on line]). No data are available on the Internet's impact according to age group. We do know, however, that people in the 18-24 age group are heavy users. Almost 76 % of this group used the Internet in a typical week in 2002 (CEFRIQ, 2003: 6-12).

In the United States, regular use of the Internet as a source of information is more prevalent among young adults than among their elders. The older groups prefer other sources of information, even though, for all age groups, consultation of news on the Internet more than doubled between 1997 and 2000 (Table 6) (Clark, Martire & Bartolomeo, Inc., 2000: 5).

TABLE 6
**Regular use of information media by age group in the United States,
1997, 2000 (%)**

	Newspapers		Local television news		International television news		Internet for news		Radio for news	
	1997	2000	1997	2000	1997	2000	1997	2000	1997	2000
Year	1997	2000	1997	2000	1997	2000	1997	2000	1997	2000
Total	51	46	63	55	42	37	7	18	49	43
Age										
18-24	33	24	44	36	17	16	7	23	31	25
18-34	36	28	49	40	24	22	8	23	43	36
35-49	49	43	62	53	37	33	8	20	55	54
50-64	63	60	73	64	53	49	6	18	54	45
65-	70	66	81	75	73	58	3	7	46	36

Source: Clark, Martire & Bartolomeo, Inc., 2000: 5.

The advent of the Internet has definitely had an impact on the sources of information used. It is important to bear in mind that news sites on the Internet are operated by traditional media, which present, in a manner adapted to the medium, information produced by a newspaper, a television network or a radio network. Apart from the survey cited above regarding Americans, very little work focuses specifically on the 18-24 group. Moreover,

the literature consulted offers precious little insight into the information content that Web surfers are looking for.

Finally, nothing in the literature makes it possible to assess the impact of media availability and distribution on newspaper readership in particular, and on the other sources of information. Individual loyalty, especially that of young adults, depends on the time available and the opportunities for certain activities.

Representations of the news media

The results of the surveys presented in the preceding section show that young people, in particular the 18-24 cohort, appear to use the traditional media the least for social and political information, with, however, one qualification regarding public affairs programs on television.

Several authors try to explain this phenomenon, which is sometimes regarded as generational. Is it in fact a generational effect, which would have long-term consequences, rather than an effect of age, which may change as individuals pass from one period of their life cycle to another? Buckingham believes that the information content of the media may be poorly adapted to the culture, identity and interests of young people: "Mainstream news journalism has failed to keep pace with the changing cultural competencies of young people" (Buckingham, 1999: 123).

This comment can perhaps be applied to another category of young people, who cannot, a priori, be suspected of being indifferent to information. One author asked 67 young American journalists in their 20s to describe the newspaper of their dreams. The survey determined the following: their dream newspaper would be a tabloid consisting of the usual sections, with an Internet version to supplement the physical paper and to provide the transparency and interactivity that are more difficult to achieve with a traditional medium. It would emphasize international coverage. "They see themselves very much as part of a global community, and they want a newspaper that reflects this," the author said (Cox, 2003 [on line]).

The young journalists also said it was important to give the news a human face and to reject biased or false information: "When something is just blatantly one-sided or wrong, it would be nice to point it out." The tone would be cynical, flippant and non-condescending. Magazine-style, narrative pieces would be prevalent. Visuals would be used to simplify and explain information. The newspaper would be entertainment-heavy, but not at the expense of news (Cox, 2003 [on line]).

A study of young Canadian journalists by David Pritchard and Florian Sauvageau showed that the values of young journalists differ considerably from those of their elders:

[Translation] Young journalists, especially those who work for English-language newspapers, reflect their generation, which tends to distrust absolutes, to consider everything in a relative fashion and to identify less with traditional institutions such as the news media and the government⁴ (Pritchard and Sauvageau, 1991: 59).

Thus young journalists tend to distance themselves from the usual definition of news and information, rejecting the fundamental value of the exact quotation. Is this representation shared by other young adults? It is not clear what form young people, as readers, would like to see. We cannot say that the dream newspaper corresponds to that of most young people, since the young journalists questioned by Pritchard and Sauvageau (1991) and by Cox (2003) already have an interest in informational matters, since they belong to the journalism profession.

It appears that young people in Quebec are critical of the way information is handled. A qualitative survey of the 18-24 age group asked about their interest in current politics and information. The findings show:

[Translation] [...] a lack of trust in the content of information that is televised or appears in the print media, which

4. « Les jeunes journalistes, tout particulièrement ceux qui sont employés par des entreprises de presse de langue anglaise, sont le reflet de leur génération, qui a tendance à se méfier des absolus, à tout considérer de manière relative et à se sentir moins associée à des institutions traditionnelles tels les médias d'information et le gouvernement ».

they often find biased and shaped by interests of all kinds. It is a question of credibility of the news, namely whether the information is partial or complete, whether it reflects the truth and whether it is objective⁵ (Boily, 2000: 68-69).

In addition, the young people spoke about the presentation of the news; they deem it demoralizing, repetitive, complex and serious, which appears to detract from their interest and thus their viewing and listening frequency (Boily, 2000: 68-69). Perhaps these young people see the Internet as a new source that is better adapted to their needs. In this respect, Frenette and Lajoie noted differences in representation of Internet use by Quebec university students. These representations vary according to the disciplines to which the students belong:

[Translation] Almost half of the subjects (47 %) agreed somewhat that it was possible to gain a better understanding of the news from the Internet, but 28 % of the students in communications agreed completely, and only 9 % of the students in psychology agreed completely⁶ (Frenette and Lajoie, 2002 [on line]).

Perhaps these young people seek information elsewhere. In a study made for the Centre d'études sur les médias, Boily shows that certain young adults [translation] "use the media very little and prefer to get information from their group of friends. In one case, the opinion of informed people in the individual's immediate circle was considered more valid than the media viewpoint" (Boily, 2000: 65). For young people, the media seem to be only one source of information among many.

From what we were able to find, there do not seem to be any comparative pan-Canadian or interprovincial studies of

5. « [...] un manque de confiance dans le contenu de l'information télédiffusée ou de la presse écrite, qu'ils trouvent biaisé, soumis à des intérêts de toutes sortes. Ils font alors référence à la crédibilité de la nouvelle, à savoir si l'information est partielle ou complète, si elle reflète la vérité et si elle est objective ».

6. « Un peu plus de la moitié des sujets (47 %) étaient plutôt en accord pour affirmer qu'il est possible de mieux comprendre les actualités à l'aide d'Internet, mais 28 % des étudiants en communication étaient totalement en accord tandis que seulement 9 % des étudiants en psychologie l'étaient ».

representations by young Canadians of the information provided by mainstream media, alternative media and other sources in individuals' social networks. In fact, apart from a few references in passing, we found very few studies that examine the use of conversation as a means of information, since the media are often regarded as the only legitimate information channels.

Integration of information

Integration of information by young people may range from mere socialization through the news to mobilization arising from increased knowledge of social, economic, cultural or political realities. In other words, the level of interest may differ from one individual to another. A number of researchers are interested in this matter, since the relationship between information and social or political involvement occupies an important place in the literature on media use by young people. But the relationship is often presented in a negative fashion. The almost causal link between young people's disenchantment with current affairs and the nature of their integration of information through the media raises the matter of the social utility and role of the media in public life. "It has a bearing on whether or not a population is politically engaged [...], and whether or not a target group is paying attention to recent public relations disasters, or by contrast charitable endeavors" (Ipsos World Monitor, 2002: 41).

A great many books and articles have been published to shed light on the decline of young people's civic, political and social involvement (Putnam, 1995; Milner, 2002; CRIC, 2001; Delli Carpini, 2000; Shah et al., 2001, McLeod et al., 1999; Eveland and Scheufele, 2000).

[Translation] The lack of interest is expressed by distance in relation to politics, which results in the individual's weak attraction to and interest in politics, as well as – in terms of opinions regarding political purposes – in significant discontent in relation to political processes, results of political

decisions and actions by politicians or groups of politicians⁷ (Gaiser et al., 2001: 98).

A portion of the literature concerns the relationship between the use and the representations of a specific medium, and the scope of civic involvement. Pinkleton and Weintraub Austin (2001: 321) state that civic involvement is positively associated with the perceived importance of newspapers and radio programs. A lack of interest in information sources may be associated with cynicism regarding public affairs.

If integration of information by young people and its impact on their interest in politics are often cited in a large number of studies, perhaps we should, conversely, examine the nature of the information transmitted by the media. The media are characterized by two conflicting types of logic: [translation] "an economic and industrial logic on the one hand and a cultural and democratic logic on the other"⁸ (Sauvageau, 2003: A17). In Canada, the balance between these two types of logic has crumbled since 1990.⁹ This phenomenon goes beyond the national framework, since market forces are now dominant on a global scale.

The media, as institutions, are part of two major trends: subordination of the media to market forces and frequency of media use by the various publics. Information may be an educational and social tool, but it is also a consumer product. New types of demand on the part of the consuming publics are also having an impact on social and political news. New journalistic forms have emerged from these changes: political talk shows,

7. « Le désintérêt s'exprime d'une part dans la distance par rapport au politique, qui se traduit par la faiblesse de l'attraction de l'individu et de son intérêt pour la politique; par ailleurs — au niveau des opinions concernant les « objets » politiques — par un mécontentement suffisamment grand vis-à-vis des processus politiques, des résultats des décisions politiques ou des actions des hommes ou groupes d'hommes politiques ».

8. « Une logique économique et industrielle d'un côté et une logique culturelle et démocratique de l'autre ».

9. Sauvageau reports that, since 1990, mergers of large entertainment and information conglomerates have created an imbalance in the information system: « La planète entière est aujourd'hui en train de basculer dans le système américain des médias commerciaux »; [translation] "The entire planet is now caught up in the American system of commercial media" (2003: A17).

tabloids and interactive Internet forums (Swanson, 2000: 410-411).

The traditional media have responded to these profound changes in two ways. First, a relaxing of journalism's traditional values and corporatist ideology regarding news¹⁰ is giving rise to hybrid media forms and converting information into a political show (Bennett, 1983). Second, journalism is now part of the new information spaces, whose notoriety can attract those who want news in brief (Swanson, 2000: 411). There is a haziness surrounding traditional and emerging information figures, with the latter often contributing to young people's increasing cynicism toward institutions.

Different perspectives, however, are proposed by certain researchers to explain young people's apparent lack of interest, especially in social and political matters. Research is calling into question the almost direct causal link between information from traditional media and young people's attitudes toward public affairs. For example, certain authors find the definition of the concept of involvement inadequate or incomplete (Gauthier, 2003; Gauthier and Piché, 2001; Gauthier and Gravel, 2003; Gaiser et al., 2001; Quéniart and Jacques, 2001; Kimberlee, 2002; Buckingham, 2000). Others point out the new places and issues of involvement (local, regional and global) (Quéniart and Jacques, 2001; Gauthier, 2003; Gauthier and Gravel, 2003). Still others emphasize the need for opportunities for involvement (Conseil de la santé et du bien-être, 2001; Forum jeunesse de l'Île de Montréal, 2001).

Although certain authors see a causal relationship between young people's dwindling interest in public affairs and their ways of using information, others question the very existence of this decline. Finally, still others are looking at the other extreme of the relationship, trying to determine whether this integration

10. According to the Commission of Freedom of the Press, requirements of press performance in contemporary society are: to provide an account of events that is true, complete and intelligent in a context which gives them meaning; to be a forum for discussion; to project a representative picture of the constituent groups in society; to present and clarify society's goals and values; and to provide full access to the day's news and opinions. (Peterson, 1956: 87-91).

of new technologies, especially the Internet, has become a mobilization tool¹¹ (Delli Carpini, 2000; George, 2000; Lemire, 2000). But this matter has never been approached from the generational standpoint.

Conclusion

From the available data, one can conclude that people in the 18-24 age group in Quebec, Canada and the United States listen to the radio and read newspapers less than their elders, but are more partial to magazines. The data also indicate that in Quebec and Canada television viewing is less popular with the 18-24 cohort. Still, we have seen that many young adults who watch a program in a specific time slot choose to watch public affairs programs. In Quebec, the share of young people who watch public affairs programs is almost as large as that of older people. Declining interest in reading newspapers and watching newscasts and public affairs programs is often associated with greater use of the Internet as a source of information. Young adults are heavy users of this new medium. For instance, in the United States young adults use the Internet more as a source of information than do their elders.

These observations raise questions about representations of the traditional information media by young people. The studies emphasize that their information content appears to be poorly adapted to the culture, identity and interests of youth. Young Quebecers are mistrustful of information provided by television and the print media, because they find it incomplete, biased, subjective and shaped by interests of all kinds. Also in Quebec, young university students believe the Internet can be used to gain a better understanding of current events, while some young adults say they get their information from their peer group.

11. For example, Delli Carpini (2000: 342) shows how individuals use the Internet for mobilization purposes because of speed, volume, accessibility and flexibility of information. Communities are being created on the basis of interests, rather than geographical areas. Anne-Marie Gingras proposes several forms of Internet integration for democratic purposes: e-mail to effect contact between groups, to create coalitions and to contact the powers that be; distribution and discussion lists to contact the public and to disseminate information (Gingras, 1999).

The matter of relationship to information also includes its integration by young adults. We have seen that individuals do not all have the same level of interest in factual information. It is therefore more difficult for the media to respond to these varied types of demand. This difficulty can be understood by the various types of logic that traverse information and subject it to change in terms of its form as well as the needs of various publics. Even though declining interest in public affairs is often associated with declining civic involvement, researchers are not convinced about this lack of interest. Some even go so far as to see the information media, above all the Internet, as tools of mobilization.

In addition to the media, several authors have stressed the importance of conversations about public affairs as sources of information, without, however, considering this phenomenon from a generational standpoint (Eliasoph, 1998; De Boer and Velthuijsen, 2001). "Participation in conversations about issues is important for several reasons: the deliberation about the arguments leads to more informed citizens with opinions they have thought about, and such conversations contribute to the mutual awareness of public opinion" (De Boer and Velthuijsen, 2001: 141). Thus information may be conveyed in ways that do not include the traditional means, namely the media.

* * *

RESEARCH ISSUES

On the basis of the information gathered from the literature, we were able to identify research questions that will enrich our knowledge of young people's relationship to information. It is necessary, however, to define certain concepts that will be central to this study and to justify the choice of the actors on whom the information gathering will be based.

Concepts to be defined

Information

For the purposes of this study, the concept of information is defined as follows: any information of social and political import that aims to establish a link between the individual and society and that ideally enables the individual and the community to form an idea of reality, especially through contextualization of local, national and international events and through analysis of issues that concern the community as a whole.

Traditional and alternative media

Michel Albert asserts that, reduced to its simplest expression, the concept of alternative media, which is difficult to define, contrasts with that of traditional media.

[Translation] A traditional media institution, be it public or private, most often aims to maximize profit, [and uses] advertisers as its main source of revenue. It almost always has a structure based on society's hierarchical social relationships [...] An alternative media institution, on the other hand, does not try (to the extent allowed by circumstances) to maximize profit, and does not primarily sell a public to advertisers as a source of revenue [...] ¹² (Albert, 2000 [on line] on the site *Espaces de la parole*).

Young people

The term “young people” refers to the young adults aged 18 to 24 who are the subject of this research. The objective is to simplify the name used for this age group, which is part of the broad category referred to as youth (Gauthier, 2000).

12. « Une institution médiatique traditionnelle (publique ou privée) vise le plus souvent à maximiser le profit, [et utilise] les annonceurs comme principale source de revenus. Elle a pratiquement toujours une structure en accord avec les relations sociales hiérarchiques de la société [...] En revanche, une institution médiatique alternative n'essaie pas (autant que le permettent les circonstances) de maximiser les bénéfices, ne vend pas principalement un public à des annonceurs comme source de revenus [...] ».

Choice of actors

We cannot talk about information without articulating its components around the actors who interact with it, namely the various publics:

[Translation] An in-depth exploration of the perspective of social actors is deemed indispensable to a fair apprehension and understanding of social behaviours [...] This makes it possible to understand and gain insight into the dilemmas and issues facing social actors¹³ (Poupart, 1997: 174).

Studies of media use, representation and integration show that behaviours and attitudes may differ depending on whether the subject is a man or a woman, older or younger (Frenette and Lajoie, 2002; CEFRIO, 2003; Aglietta, 1999; Althaus and Tewksbury, 2000; Bréda, 2001; Caron, 1999; Environics Research Group Media Awareness Network, 2001). To gain a deeper understanding of this matter, a group of young people is the spontaneous choice. They appear to be the group most likely to have adopted new practices, including Internet integration.

Studies of young people, media and information often focus on children or teenagers (Facer and Furlong, 2001; Thorup, 1998; Buckingham, 1999; McLeod, 2000; Livingstone, 2002; Aglietta, 1999; Bréda, 2001; Caron, 1999). Although interesting for theoretical comparisons, their findings cannot shed light on the specific situation of young adults aged 18 to 24. The living conditions of these young people are different from those of the younger cohorts. The transition to a working life and cohabitation shapes young adults' relationship with cultural practices (Boily, Duval and Gauthier, 2000).

No national or interprovincial study of young adults, information and the various media has been made in Canada. It is therefore relevant to explore the relationship to information of this age group in particular.

13. « Une exploration en profondeur de la perspective des acteurs sociaux est jugée indispensable à une juste appréhension et compréhension des conduites sociales [...] Elle permet de comprendre et de connaître de l'intérieur les dilemmes et les enjeux auxquels font face les acteurs sociaux ».

Research questions

Use of information sources

Several studies of media use, especially newspapers, the Internet and television, show a constant decline in newspaper readership year after year. We have seen that young, French-speaking Quebecers choose to obtain information from television newscasts and public affairs programs. But what about other Canadians?

In addition, certain studies are already showing that information can also come from other sources, such as magazines, family conversations, peer groups and school. But very few studies have been made in Canada, and even fewer with the purpose of making comparisons between the provinces regarding this matter. This observation is an incentive to explore the use of the media and other sources of information by young adults who are aged 18 to 24 and live in various Canadian provinces.

Many questions come to mind. Is information seeking a common practice for young adults? Does it differ from one city to another? What type of information are they looking for? Do young men and young women adopt the same practices and make the same choices? Where and how do young people obtain information? Does their schedule allowed them to regularly follow events as they unfold in society? How do they generally incorporate this information into their daily life? Why do they pick the sources they use and what are their preferences? Are there any notable differences between Anglophones and Francophones?

Representations of information

Studies generally show that young adults aged 18 to 24 are less interested than their elders in social and political information. Still, the data available on the viewing of information programs in Quebec show, at the very least, that young people watch information programs on television. Could it be that the type of medium affects their use and representations of information? We therefore want to understand the representations

that young people make of information. Does it interest them? Does it enable them to familiarize themselves with and understand current events? How do they perceive media institutions? What is their perception of the traditional media, the Internet and the so-called alternative media? Are they aware of the existence of other sources of information? Are they more interested in news flashes or in analytical content?

Integration of information

Information, and its main means of dissemination, the media, are useful in the social realm. How does information become accessible to all young people? How do they integrate it? Are there significant differences between the least educated and the most educated, since the latter have traditionally been more partial to information? Does information enable them all to form a picture of social reality? Does it cover the issues that interest them? Is its format adapted to their level of understanding and knowledge? In addition, the new forms of mobilization are often connected with a new and distinct way of using the media, especially the Internet. In this context, how can information become a social engine and a tool of citizenship education?

* * *

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Once the issue was defined, choices had to be made regarding research method, recruitment strategies and interviews. The research entailed hiring and training interviewers to conduct interviews in the three cities selected for the research. Recruitment difficulties made it necessary to change the objectives regarding the number of interviews and the work schedule.

Choice of method

Emphasis was placed on qualitative research to explore the research subject in depth, given the limited existing knowledge of the attitudes of young Canadians aged 18 to 24 regarding information. We decided that semi-structured interviews, with

open questions, were an appropriate way of fostering expression of ideas by the participants and expanding the exploration possibilities (interview framework in Appendix 2).

We decided to use Glaser and Strauss's "grounded theory" (1967) to analyze the young people's comments. We thus had to ensure the participants presented diverse demographic characteristics to achieve a degree of data saturation and to cover a range of attitudes. The makeup of the sample was based on the following variables: sex; age (18 to 24); occupation (student, worker, unemployed); level of education (high school, college, university); place of residence (living in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver for at least 10 years); and language spoken (English or French). As a complement to these variables, special attention was paid to the interest that individuals said they had in information and the fact that they considered themselves poorly informed or well informed about what was happening in Canada and elsewhere in the world.

The interviews took the form of focus groups, as requested by the Centre d'études sur les médias. The advantage of this technique is that it enhances interaction and deindividualizes participants' answers. [Translation] "Approaching subjects through group interviews encourages them to think about media reception more in social or collective terms."¹⁴ (Morley, 1992, cited in Proulx, 1998: 156). Despite this advantage, such an information-gathering method has certain weaknesses: the expression of personal opinions may be accentuated or diminished within a group, depending on individual skills and competencies. For instance, the presence of a group leader may have an influence on certain participants or be conducive to the expression of similar opinions. This was clearly the case with one of the discussion groups.

The groups were formed on the basis of language spoken and were diversified as a function of the selected variables. They were to be allocated as follows: four groups of five Francophones and two groups of five Anglophones in Montreal, and four groups

14. «Le fait d'approcher les sujets au moyen d'entrevues de groupe les invite à penser la question de la réception davantage en termes sociaux ou collectifs».

of five Anglophones in Toronto and Vancouver each, for a sample of 70 individuals.

Conduct of research

Schedule

The work planned in the research specifications underwent several changes. The project was initially to have begun in the spring of 2004 but was postponed until the fall as a result of the delay in hiring a research assistant in Vancouver and the approaching summer vacation period. In addition, the schedule for the group interviews could not be respected. As a result of health problems, a replacement had to be recruited to take over one interviewer's tasks. As well, additional group interviews had to be conducted to reach the planned number of respondents in each city. The unforeseeable absence of participants when group interviews were held made it necessary to conduct additional interviews in Montreal and Vancouver.

Recruitment strategies

Several strategies were used to recruit participants: personal networks (friends, family, work and school); direct contacts with various organizations (employment centres, local YWCAs, job counselling centres at educational institutions, student associations, organizations working with young people, etc.); posters and leaflets in public places and at educational institutions (grocery stores, businesses, shopping centres, secondary schools, colleges and universities); alumni mailing lists used by educational institutions; and finally word-of-mouth among the participants themselves.

The \$25 fee paid to the participants seems to have facilitated recruitment, although the participants' interest in general was an important factor. A telephone or e-mail reminder (occasionally both) was sent to the participants 24 to 48 hours before the meeting to ensure they would attend.

This project was accepted by the Research Ethics Committee of the *Institut national de la recherche scientifique*. The research assistants signed a confidentiality form. The participants received

an information letter specifying the research objective and method, and the precautions that would be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the results and to preserve the participants' anonymity as well as the persons to contact in the event of difficulty or dispute. They then signed a consent form (forms in Appendices 3 to 5).

Group interviews

Research assistants were hired to recruit respondents and to conduct the interviews in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. They received training enabling them: 1) to familiarize themselves with the research findings and statistics available on the media practices of young people aged 18-24; 2) to understand the research objectives; 3) to discuss the characteristics of the target sample, techniques for recruitment of participants and techniques for leading group interviews; and 4) to familiarize themselves with the survey tool. Supervision of the interviewers' work was done from Quebec City, with numerous telephone conversations and e-mails. Experience shows, however, that on-site supervision throughout the work permits closer control over the various stages of field research.

The interviews took place from October 6, 2004, to February 18, 2005. They were held at university premises that were easy for the participants to reach, at the end of a weekday or on a weekend, depending on availability. They lasted from 45 minutes to two and a half hours, and the size of the groups ranged from two to seven participants. The interviews in Toronto and Vancouver took place in English, while in Montreal five interviews were conducted in French and three in English, to meet the requirements of the mandate. Before the interviews began, all participants had to complete a sheet to provide certain information on their socio-demographic characteristics (Appendix 6).

Difficulties encountered

At the time of recruitment, it was necessary to reassure several Montrealers who suspected that a marketing firm was behind the project and was seeking more effective strategies for targeting young people. It was also necessary to explain to certain young

people who said they were less informed about current events that the research objective was to learn about their attitudes toward information and not to determine their level of knowledge.

As for the conduct of the interviews, the unforeseeable absence of participants had several consequences: the need to cope with a different group dynamic since the participants had been selected on the basis of certain socio-demographic variables; the need to conduct interviews with very few people; and the need to reorganize the makeup of future discussion groups and to increase their size.

Other difficulties, owing this time to the diverse characteristics of the participants, were: 1) to encourage people not interested in social issues or not interested in becoming informed to take part in the project; and 2) to contact individuals who are not part of any network (work, job search, educational institutions, associations, etc.). A specific, personalized approach bore fruit on several occasions. A few participants who said they were less informed about what was happening in Canada and elsewhere in the world may have felt slightly uncomfortable when asked questions that seem to be designed for better-informed people (interview framework in Appendix 2). Given this situation, the interviewers were able to restate the questions in a way that was conducive to the expression of the participants' opinions and interests.

Finally, the recording of the interviews generally went well, with the exception of technical difficulties that occurred during one interview in Vancouver; about 10 minutes of the discussion was lost, which the interviewer tried to recall from memory.

Research limitations

The objective of comparing the behaviours and attitudes of young Canadian adults living in three large urban areas that are geographically distant was reached, but did not yield a great deal of differences between the sub-groups of respondents. In reality, the findings show more similarities in behaviours and attitudes, an observation that is not in doubt since these convergences are quite clear from the respondents' comments. Where the shoe pinches, in our opinion, is in terms of the scope

of the research, which covered several dimensions and sub-dimensions (see the interview framework in Appendix 2). A few differences were determined, but it might have been possible to define them further if we had limited the research field to the informational aspect, since media consumption indicates above all similarities in the use, constraints on and ease of access to information.

Sample

Changes were made during the research to achieve the data-collection objectives. The number of group interviews was increased from 14 to 17. Despite the efforts made, the Vancouver sample consisted of 18 people instead of 20. The Toronto sample totalled 21 individuals and the Montreal sample, 31, for a total of 70 participants. The description of the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants who formed the sample is given in Appendix 6. To ensure additional information, their fields of study and professional activities were diversified. For example, the study areas included the following: computer science (2), communications and arts (3), public relations (1), business administration (5), marketing (2), pure science (6), applied sciences (3), political science (5), economics (1), journalism (1), recreation and leisure (5), arts and visual arts (9), psychology (2), architecture (3), sociology (1), college general (6) and technical (1), human sciences diploma (4).

Data analysis

The group discussions were transcribed as they were conducted in order to ensure close control over information gathering and to rapidly take any necessary corrective measures. The material was then codified with Nud*Ist software used for the qualitative analysis. This analytical material was classified under various headings. Practices related to information seeking refer to current events that interest the participants, the information sources they use and their habits. Representations cover two aspects: the one is related to individuals and the other to the media. Representations related to individuals refer to what it means to "be informed" for today's young people and the way the respondents evaluate their own level of knowledge of what

is happening in Canada and elsewhere in the world. Representations related to the media relate to what the respondents think of current media coverage, the content and format of the information transmitted by traditional or electronic media, media sources and the role of the media. Finally, integration of information refers to the competency, on the one hand, of the respondents who integrate the information and, on the other, to that of the media that transmit it. Integration of information also includes the impact that information may have on the respondents, on their actions as citizens, consumers, etc.

The analysis is fleshed out with numerous quotations illustrating the respondents' comments. The code used for each quotation is the following: identification of the city (MO = Montreal; TO = Toronto; VA = Vancouver), followed by the sequential order of the interviews (01 to 04 for Toronto; 01 to 05 for Vancouver; in the case of Montreal, 01-F to 05-F for the interviews in French and 06-E to 08-E for interviews in English).

CHAPTER 2

A look at the practices

This chapter provides a better understanding of the behaviours and attitudes of young Canadians aged 18 to 24 in their use of the media. The research makes it possible to determine the current events that attract their attention, the information sources they use to become informed and the reasons for their choices, as well as the habits they have developed. It also provides clarification of what it means to “be informed” for today’s young people. At the same time, it was possible to check whether the respondents perceive themselves as informed about what is happening in Canada and elsewhere in the world and whether they believe their generation is informed.

SUBJECTS OF INTEREST IN INFORMATION SEEKING

The respondents, regardless of their city of residence, demonstrate common interests and similar attitudes in their information seeking. In fact, the diversity observed is more a reflection of individual characteristics specific to an age group that holds shared values but has a heterogeneous social profile.

The general impression obtained from their comments is that most are familiar with daily current events, and that everyone knows about certain subjects, owing to their importance.

[Translation] Like it or not, we all wanted to see what happened with the American election because we want to know who will be controlling the world for the next four years¹⁵ (MO 04-F, man, age 18).

The media's presence in almost all Canadian households at any time of day as well as the media's access to the public realm, especially the workplace and stores, ensure that information reaches almost the entire population, in one form or another. It appears to be difficult not to be informed. But what are they informed about? Consumers benefit from the diversity of media and information formats, owing to competition between serious information and entertainment information, with the latter increasingly flourishing.

[Translation] Even if you don't want to be informed, you are. I'm informed about lots of subjects but of all the information I get every day, there's 25 % that I believe pertains to my duty as a citizen¹⁶ (MO 01-F, man, age 21).

The subjects that attract the respondents' attention are closely related to current events and issues that draw on their values or have an impact on their lives. The subjects most often cited are political, social and environmental issues. The following list is not exhaustive because the respondents had to react spontaneously to the question, but it gives a good idea of their interests. The political subjects include election campaigns (including the American presidential campaign, which most of them followed), economic and social policies, and the political climate in general, in Canada and elsewhere in the world. They cited the war in Iraq, the situation in the Middle East, the natural wealth that the water or the Canada's North resources represent and the sponsorship scandal. Generally speaking, the respondents' degree of interest in politics and political issues ranges from one the extreme to the other. There is greater and apparently regular interest on the part of those who have a sense of carrying out

15. « Les élections américaines, qu'on le veuille ou non, on est tous allés voir parce qu'on veut voir qui contrôlera le monde pendant quatre ans ».

16. « Quand même bien tu ne voudrais pas être informé, tu l'es. Je suis informé de plein de sujets mais sur le 100 % d'information que j'ai par jour, il y a 25 % que je classe dans le devoir de citoyen que j'ai à faire ».

their duties as citizens, who are committed to social causes or who have to maintain a high level of knowledge for their work. We can therefore conclude that what we would call a “relationship of proximity to the news” is conducive to a taste for, a natural interest in or maintenance of a high level of interest in a given subject on the part of many respondents.

Everything is somewhat political, you know. That’s just the way things work. You need to be informed on policies and the governments in power. You may not want to be, but I think you have to be (TO 04, man, age 24).

In other cases, interest in political issues tends to be short-lived and occurs during election campaigns or an event affecting a people or a country to which they are connected by family history. A small number said they take no interest whatsoever in politics in general. In these cases, we saw a relationship of indifference to this type of information.

As for social issues, the respondents’ interests include equity and social justice, education, human rights, the status of women and ethnocultural minorities, gay marriage, aboriginal affairs, violence in daily life and in time of war, sexual abuse and natural disasters that cause human tragedy. As for environmental issues, subjects affecting the future of the human race are central to their concerns: electrical energy, recycling, ecology and sustainable development. Other subjects of interest that they talked about are health, science and technology, food, consumerism, culture, nature, economics and history. The respondents’ interest in information of social, political and economic significance stems from three types of motivation: it is personal, job-related or education-related. For some respondents, school has had an impact on their behaviour. In the educational environment, they acquired certain behaviours involving research and development of various subjects. This interest has persisted and has positively modified their relationship to information.

Although entertainment-related information was not part of this research, certain participants made reference to it, expressing certain preferences (sports, movies, fashion, the arts, shows, music, celebrities, etc.). We must conclude that, for certain respondents, entertainment takes precedence over information,

owing to their lack of interest in serious news or an overload of information describing realities they consider depressing.

I think that's escapism [an interest in celebrities], because as we've all said, it's depressing and it's too real, and there's too much real stuff in our faces. [...] I know what's going on, and I know almost too much. It's the same news every night. More people are dead. More people have been shot. More people are not recycling (TO 04, woman, age 24).

The respondents' interests also show the attention they pay to what is happening elsewhere in the world. Openness to the world is abundantly illustrated by the comments of the respondents, who for the most part are interested in international news. Some even prefer international news to Canadian or provincial news. Others, however, place priority on Canadian news rather than foreign news. Very few expressed an interest in municipal news (especially politics) or regional news. Those who said that American news took precedence over Canadian news were also the exception. This time, the difference was related to the respondents' city of residence. Certain respondents from Toronto and Vancouver take little interest in Canadian media coverage and instead turn to international news. Some commented on the citizen's lack of power to change anything in state governance, the more important issues occurring in other countries, since Canada is a country without problems, state governance that seems to lead nowhere and, finally, boring or inadequate media coverage.

If something piques my interest, it will be usually about Canadian issues. But again, there are so few and so short and so buried in the newscast, that these sections on Canadian things are hard to pick up, because we're so bombarded by American things on the front covers of magazines and stuff. We can't really get Canadian topics unless we do search, and I just don't have time, whether it's my home life, friends, family... (TO 02, woman, age 22).

Because of the interest thing, it's [Canadian politics] so deadly boring. [...] I don't know, I think it's just because a lot of Canadian government is just about not getting anything done, so following it seems a waste of time (VA 03, woman, age 23).

A deeper analysis shows different behaviours in information seeking. Certain respondents have a natural curiosity about many subjects in the news and try to stay informed about target subjects. Their information seeking is active and dynamic in an information universe where news is disseminated massively, from everywhere in the world. They easily adopt a selective attitude toward media coverage and want to optimize the time they spend becoming informed.

So I think I am, to a certain extent, selective in the type of stories I get. I mean, I will try and look at as many issues as I can. But just because of the nature of my personal interests, I will pick out the ones that I sort of focus on more (VA 01, man, age 20).

Certain individuals want to understand, so they go beyond the current event and look for the historic background. Their information seeking isn't motivated by personal interest and it isn't for simple enjoyment, but has fundamental meaning: [Translation] "It's a need to know the background of a certain person, a certain party or history in general"¹⁷ (MO 01-F, man, age 23).

In contrast, many have no specific interests so they take bits of information here and there that may attract their attention. Their relationship to information is rather passive in that information comes to them, not the opposite, and the content of the information is of very little importance: "If it doesn't hit me in the face when I pick up the newspaper or when I turn the news on... if I don't hear it everywhere, I don't really care that I don't know it" (TO 03, woman, age 20).

Despite the power of attraction of major headlines, certain types of news given front-page treatment by the media fail to interest certain individuals because they have no impact on their lives or do not reflect their current concerns.

Like the sponsorship scandal, it doesn't affect me really, so why should I care about it? I mean other than the fact that

17. «C'est un besoin de savoir c'est quoi l'historique de telle personne, tel parti et l'histoire en général».

I'm probably paying for it through taxes some way. So, given time, I would like to be more informed about it, but since there is no easy summary somewhere or running total of what is happening in that story, I just tune out of it (TO 01, man, age 22).

Between these two extremes are those who are informed about subjects covered on a daily basis and are attracted by large headlines, which in their opinion provide the most important news.

[Translation] I believe in agenda setting. I suppose I regularly follow the front page of newspapers [...] Everything that makes the front page of [name of a major newspaper] gets talked about. I think if it makes the first page and it's the lead item on [name of a television network], it's got to be something important¹⁸ (MO 01-F, woman, age 20).

The respondents have therefore developed behaviours that differ depending on the importance they place on current events and their desire to be informed. They share a common interest in certain current events and international news.

INFORMATION SOURCES

The information market offers a wide range of media sources that today's young people can easily access and therefore gives rise to different user profiles. Their information seeking does not, however, involve media niches only. It involves other transmission vectors that they perceived as equally credible as the media, and sometimes even more credible, depending on the representations of them by individuals.

18. « Moi je crois à l'*agenda setting*. Je pense que je suis régulièrement ce qu'il y a sur la première page des journaux. [...] Tout ce qui fait le *front page* du [nom d'un grand journal], on va en parler. Je me dis si ça fait la première page et c'est la première nouvelle à [nom d'une chaîne de télévision], sûrement que ça doit avoir de l'allure ».

The media

The respondents' practices show access to a wide range of media. When they are looking for information about current events, the Internet, television and newspapers are popular sources of information, although the radio attracts very few young people, since they consider it boring or incomplete in comparison with televised or journalistic content. Magazines seem to be used as a source of information for more specific subjects. Joint use of these media is a common practice for these individuals, for reasons of accessibility and momentary availability, but also as a result of an express desire to learn about current events from different analytical standpoints. This approach is probably characteristic of today's young people, who have a wider range of media sources than previous cohorts did, and as a result have a sharper critical sense regarding media content and sources.

So I would read the newspaper or something on the Internet, and I would take the common points from those and match it with something on the TV (TO 01, woman, age 23).

Different user profiles emerge from the practices. Some use the Internet more than other media or even make it their main source. Some prefer television newscasts whereas others place priority on newspapers. Other users have no preference and switch from one medium to another at their convenience. Finally, some make practically no use of the media or only minimal use for utilitarian needs.

[Translation] I never watch TV. I just never turn on the TV. As for newspapers, if I open a newspaper it's for job ads or apartments. I never even glance at the other pages. I go directly to what I'm looking for¹⁹ (MO 05-F, man, age 19).

The Internet creates clear enthusiasm on the part of almost all the young people interviewed, since they find it offers a multitude of advantages: the most up-to-date information; the ability to find information quickly and easily; the immediacy of

19. « Je n'écoute jamais la télé. Je n'ouvre jamais la télé. Les journaux, si je cherche dans le journal, c'est pour des offres de job ou des appartements. Je ne scanne même pas les autres pages, je vais directement ».

abbreviated daily coverage (major headlines and summaries); accessibility to a wide range of sources that are mainstream or alternative, local or foreign; no cost; the ability to obtain additional information from newspaper archives or links to various Web sites; and the flexibility of the medium, which makes it possible to select desired information. Certain users seem to have adopted a ritual: they use as their homepage a site that gives them the day's main events. The attraction of this medium is deeply ingrained in the behaviour of today's young people and seems to be here to stay.

[Translation] Especially since we use the Internet with such ease, we're the Internet generation, we were born with it. We can really get a great deal of information from it, and that's a big help when you want complete information²⁰ (MO 01-F, woman, age 18).

The sites visited by Web surfers are often operated by mainstream media that offer a free electronic version of the day's major events. Alternative media sites are also appealing to many respondents who are attracted by their analytical points of view, which differ from those of the major print media corporations. They clearly seek out independent sources. Toronto and Vancouver are the cities where the largest number of participants said they visit sites conducive to discussions between users and created by interest groups or by individuals. Their objective is not necessarily to take part in the discussions, but to obtain a wide range of views on various subjects so they can form their own opinions. In addition, the desire to have a fair understanding of issues and events encourages many to obtain information not only from sources available nationally, but also from foreign sources, especially those in the countries involved, so that they can obtain information that presents a different interpretation of the event or the issue, based on other schools of thought.

As for newspaper reading (hard copy), many young people prefer traditional newspapers, whether they are broadsheets,

20. «Surtout avec la facilité que l'on a d'utiliser Internet, on est la génération Internet, on est nés là-dedans. On peut vraiment aller chercher énormément d'information là-dedans et cela aide beaucoup pour avoir l'information complète».

tabloids or newspapers distributed on public transit systems. Alternative newspapers are regarded as complementary and rarely constitute their main source of information. On a smaller scale, regional, neighbourhood and university newspapers attract only a small number of respondents who have a feeling of belonging to their community or the region they come from. Despite the appeal of the Internet, the attraction of the printed document persists for those who consider reading a newspaper to be a pleasant ritual.

[Translation] I like the paper medium because you can have it whenever you want, you can read what you want, you can cut out what you want²¹ (MO 03-F, woman, age 24).

The paper allows me to find articles that I want to read, that I want to talk about, articles that excite me (VA 02, man, age 23).

The advantages of reading a newspaper as a source of information are as follows: detailed, in-depth information; the ability to select subjects of interest and take time to understand the news, versus the lack of control with a news broadcast; and easier reading than with an electronic medium. The fact that some newspapers are free of charge is also a use factor, whether the newspapers are available at home or in public places. The distribution of newspapers on public transit systems seems to be having a positive impact, since the young people interviewed referred to them frequently: "It's perfect for the time I have between two stops, and it keeps me up-to-date" (TO 02, woman, age 20). In Montreal, for example, the respondents more frequently cited a newspaper distributed in the Metro than a tabloid popular with their age group according to the findings of a 1999 study of media use by young people living in Quebec City and Montreal (Boily, 2000). We can assume that there is a link between this new product and their change in behaviour. As we have seen, certain factors are conducive to reading a hard copy of a newspaper. Conversely, some respondents do not use this medium because of the following factors: complicated handling

21. «Je trouve que le médium papier est intéressant parce que tu peux l'avoir quand tu veux, et tu peux lire ce que tu veux, tu peux découper ce que tu veux».

because of the format and many sections; ecological concerns favouring use of the Internet; and concentrated ownership of the print media, which encourages participants to obtain information from means other than traditional newspapers.

[...] it seems that papers have become biased, especially since they have been bought by big corporations. I'd rather get some information elsewhere (MO 06-E, man, age 24).

The respondents' practices show the Internet's power of attraction as a source of information. This is proved by the behavioural changes of certain participants or members of their family, who use the Internet more intensively or have stopped subscribing to newspaper in favour of the Internet. This leads us to believe that free access to an electronic summary of the day's news is not an incentive to purchase or to subscribe to a newspaper for young people who have many other sources to round out their information and the skills to do so. In addition, certain respondents even predicted that the popularity of printed newspapers will decline in favour of the electronic format, a practice that, as we see from their behaviour, is quite real already.

[Translation] People who know [they] only have to press two or three buttons to get the news aren't going to go out and buy it [the newspaper]²² (MO 04-F, woman, age 19).

Television, for its part, is perceived as a medium that is easy to access, with newscast times that are known to all respondents and may suit them if they have free time in the evening. The respondents watch newscasts on general or specialist networks, depending on whether they have access to cable and depending on their expectations of the news networks. They obtain information most often from newscasts as opposed to other types of programs, which may appeal to them but do not inspire viewer loyalty on their part. Moreover, the difficulty of attracting the loyalty of young adults was demonstrated in the 1999 study showing that the media were included in their schedule if they had their free time, but that social activities took precedence (Boily, 2000).

22. «Les gens qui savent [qu'ils n'ont] qu'à peser sur 2-3 pitons pour avoir la nouvelle, ils ne vont pas aller l'acheter [le journal] ».

Conversation

We have barely started to consider the importance of conversation as an information transmission vector for this age group, since it is an informal means that is widespread in the daily lives of all young people. Certain young people believe that “socializing is a key place to get information” (TO 03, woman, age 20). In this respect, certain group discussions provided ample evidence of the discussion dynamic between peers.

It is not surprising that sociability plays an important role in the transmission of information, since it is a characteristic of today’s youth. Word of mouth seems to be a natural mechanism for transmitting information and for suggesting sources of information. Conversations about social and political subjects commonly take place within immediate social networks formed by family members, co-workers or fellow students, professors and friends, who occupy a predominant place.

[Translation] Let’s say you’re at a party with friends. At some point somebody will always start talking about politics. And everybody has had a beer and everybody wants to talk at the same time. There are so many points of view that come out all at once. It seems to me that at parties, that’s where you learn the most [...] There’s so much different information²³ (MO 03-F, woman, age 21).

The respondents’ immediate circle sometimes represents the first source of information, which prompts certain young people to try to learn more about a subject from the media or from books. Frequently a parent will be the key person, owing to his or her learning, activism, specialized expertise in certain areas or general knowledge of current events. This resource person, whether a parent, a friend or an acquaintance, possesses a high level of knowledge, if not credibility, in their eyes. Other

23. « Mettons que l’on fait une fête entre amis. Il y a toujours un moment où quelqu’un va dire quelque chose sur la politique. Et tout le monde a pris une bière et tout le monde veut parler en même temps. Il y a tellement de points de vue qui sortent en même temps. Il me semble que dans les fêtes, c’est comme ça qu’on en apprend le plus. [...] Cela fait tellement d’informations différentes ».

situations show that oral discussions are conducive to completing information already acquired or to comparing one's ideas with those of others, enriching knowledge through a diversity of viewpoints, developing a critical sense or forming opinions. In this context, the immediate circle is a complementary and dynamic means conducive to deeper knowledge of the news.

One person might agree with someone else or one person might not. So he'll research it [a subject] or look it up, just to prove him wrong. You know, everybody is just feeding off of it and knowledge just expands (TO 03, man, age 18).

In certain cases, the respondents consider themselves a resource person for family and friends, owing to their store of knowledge. In this case, the transfer of knowledge goes in the opposite direction. To summarize, recourse to their immediate circle enables respondents to make contact with the news, to deepen their knowledge of it or to gauge their understanding of issues. Generally speaking, the process of acquiring information and understanding events and social issues obviously involves the logic of an oral discussion, which permits a certain reflexive attitude regarding what they know (or don't know) and the sources they use.

If family and friends can constitute an important source of information, school also plays an important role for a number of young people. Its positive influence, through certain programs or professors, takes place on several levels: it helps arouse the curiosity and open the minds of students who have no interest in public matters; it helps them develop a social conscience and a critical sense by drawing attention to media coverage and interpretation of the news; it provides tools for understanding as a result of a professor's ability to connect today's events with yesterday's; and it encourages the expression of opinions through a dynamic approach based on class discussion and debate.

I noticed that after taking their classes, there are so many things that I used to not pay attention to, and now I do. [...] So, for me, if it wasn't for that one class, then I wouldn't be bothered to learn more (TO 02, woman, age 22).

The respondents' comments show that family and school are socialization agents that definitely play an important role in young people's awareness of the reality surrounding them and their understanding of issues affecting the community and the planet, in the context of globalization. School in particular seems to play an increasing awareness and training role in the area of media and citizenship education, since being informed involves a degree of complexity owing to the exponential growth of the information market and the issues themselves, which require an ever-larger store of knowledge to understand their basic meaning. Although the challenge of access to information seems to have been met in the developed Western societies, a major challenge remains: to ensure today's young people are well-informed citizens.

You know, especially when I was younger, there would be issues going on, and I guess it takes initiative to educate yourself, and it takes a lot of discipline to understand what's going on. And it's not in just like news, it's in anything you do, you need initiative. [...] They [the schools] could easily get some kind of news media [education in classes], just like twice a week, like an hour a week. That makes a huge difference. Especially [for] those who are too lazy to take the initiative (VA 05, man, age 21).

Other sources of information

The respondents stressed that they use means other than the media to research subjects or to deepen information already acquired from the media. The medium cited most often is books. Certain respondents complete their information search with books that provide in-depth analysis of subjects that interest them or a historical perspective on current events. Others attend debates and conferences, especially in the educational environment, which provide opportunities to hear the views of experts. Others take trips that develop their taste for an understanding of the world and their own country. Finally, some obtain a portion of their information from certain types of art. The feature-length documentary film seems to be popular.

[...] when you're talking about getting information, I guess people in general should not just turn to the newspaper, the Internet or the news... You have to take into consideration music, as well as movies, especially some of the stuff that Michael Moore's been doing. He's definitely been shifting the ground of what the movie medium could be (TO 03, woman, age 20).

The sources of information deemed relevant by the respondents are numerous. They remind us that the media do not represent the only way of understanding reality in Canada and elsewhere.

Considerations regarding choice of media sources

The analysis of practices shows that the attention paid to the media source (print, visual or electronic) varies from one respondent to another. Some ascribe no importance to it or never think about it. Others, however, take the source into consideration as a function of the subject covered.

Concerns about the source can be divided into two main categories: media ownership and geographical origin. In the first case, the choice of medium in relation to ownership (especially in the case of newspapers) seems to be important, when the respondents are looking for complete, objective coverage of current events and are aware of the impact of corporate interests on media coverage. In other words, the medium's strategic bias and the private interests that shape it are factors that affect choice of medium. In the second case – geographical origin – political interests, occasionally connected with a national vision, and their impact on media coverage are influencing factors. Thus the geographical origin of the medium or the article tends to become the selection factor, although the medium's strategic bias may play a role, depending on the subject. A common strategy involves consulting several sources (mainstream and alternative, local and foreign, independent, etc.) to obtain various interpretations of significant current events and to get as close as possible to the truth.

[Translation] Take the war in Iraq, if I read a French source, the information won't be the same as in an American source²⁴ (MO 01-F, woman, age 18).

This practice of getting information from several sources is also based on considerations such as the desire to learn about the current event from the standpoint of the country where the event is taking place (the prohibition on wearing head scarves in French schools, for example), attachment to family roots (a newspaper from one's country of origin) or curiosity about the expertise of the media in one country as opposed to another.

Another thing I do too is I like to read newspapers from different countries. Sometimes I'll read from Britain, or if I can get it translated, sometimes from Spain or Vietnam. Because I like to see how other people write things, and I love to see other perspectives to compare media (VA 04, woman, age 20).

Use of the media as a function of the source is based on different objectives, but nevertheless indicates a central concern, namely the desire to be well informed and to form opinions based on unbiased content. Many expressed the opinion that, owing to the monopoly that multinationals have over information or to political partisanship, there is control over information and the way it is disseminated.

I feel like our generation is jaded by the media because you see fake sources and who owns what paper. We are a lot more aware of that now, they are like the enemy (MO 08-E, woman, age 24).

This necessarily creates a relationship of mistrust regarding information and accentuates the search for information from several sources. This aspect of the matter will be discussed in greater depth in the point on degree of trust in information sources. This mistrust seems to be conducive to the use of alternative media, which, owing to their independent status, appear to be

24. « Si on regarde pendant la guerre en Irak, si je vais lire un média français, ce ne sera pas la même information qu'un média américain ».

effective ways of checking whether information provided by the mainstream media accurately reflects current events and issues.

* * *

HABITS IN PRACTICE

As with media use, which shows various types of users, we see that the respondents' habits are varied when we examine the frequency with which they obtain information. In addition, their habits reveal factors that facilitate or restrict the search for information. The ease of access to information and the constraints observed in their practices are specific to each, while also being common to this age group.

Frequency of habits

We have already seen that behaviour in relation to media use varies according to preferences: respondents prefer printed matter or a visual medium, a local or a foreign source, versatility, etc. Their habits in terms of the time they devote to becoming informed are also diversified.

Representing the lowest level of frequency are those respondents who make an effort to become informed very rarely, sporadically or on a highly irregular basis, mainly because of their lack of interest. Only an extremely important subject will retain their attention (for example, election campaigns and the Olympic Games are subjects that may intensify their use), and friends may play an important role in their information gathering. Next, we find those whose more or less regular use is based on opportunities that arise or respondents' daily schedules. Access to a medium and schedules are determining factors. For example, being at home during a television newscast or having a newspaper within reach represents a favourable opportunity.

I'll read it [the newspaper], but I don't go out my way to read it. But when it is in presence, I absolutely love it (MO 08-E, woman, age 21).

As for regular practice, it takes several forms. The first is of lesser intensity, as a result of a habit concentrated above all on the weekends and closely related to the respondents' schedules. The second is a more intense practice that involves using the media at least three times a week and is concentrated during the week, with the weekends reserved for entertainment. The third is a daily or almost daily practice that takes the form of a routine, either in the morning or in the evening at home, during the workday or at school. Once again, the behaviours that go along with this routine are very different. It may involve reading the newspaper thoroughly or merely scanning the major headlines or checking the day's current events on Web sites. In the last case, the respondents either restrict themselves to Web sites or they select from this information the news they want to learn more about.

I do mine [search of information] on a daily basis. When I go on the Internet, for instance, my home page is Google News. And it just takes like five seconds to quickly browse through what's happening and just carry on (VA 05, woman, age 21).

Others, who tend to be information buffs, take a look at several types of medium.

[Translation] I have my little routine, in the morning during breakfast, with [name of television network], then a newspaper and the Internet, one after the other!²⁵ (MO 01-F, woman, age 18).

Given the torrent of information about the most minor piece of news deemed to be of interest to the public, it appears that at the very least familiarization with major current events and issues, without that leading systematically to a search for more analytical content, is fairly widespread behaviour. Forming an idea of the world's reality involves a larger physical area than ever in the current context in which geographic distance is no longer an obstacle. The abundance of information has therefore prompted many to establish fairly regular practices, even if they allocate minimal time to them.

25. «Moi j'ai ma petite routine, c'est le matin en déjeunant, avec [nom de la chaîne de télévision], avec ton journal, tu te mets sur Internet. Ben là, un après l'autre!»

[Translation] But when you don't make the effort to be informed... I really had the impression that the world kept turning, but I was really the exception. The world kept turning but I was outside of that²⁶ (MO 04-F, man, age 20).

In addition, regularity and intensity of habits seem to be linked to the respondents' occupations. The respondents whose habits are the most regular and the most intense are those who are activists or are socially involved, or whose job or program of study requires that they be informed. This, however, does not exclude a natural interest in public matters, which may lead to similar behaviour.

Habits in practice reflect, to a certain extent, the respondents' degree of interest in information. They are also subordinate to other factors, namely the respondents' access to information and schedules.

Access to information

No-cost access to media is a use factor that is conducive to practices and is seen on the part of respondents in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. It was also seen in the 1999 study made in Quebec City and Montreal (Boily, 2000). Apart from television and radio, which are found in almost all Canadian households, opportunities for free access are numerous: newspapers and magazines in public transit systems, restaurants, waiting rooms, at work and on university campuses; Internet access at school and work; cable television, newspaper and magazine subscriptions taken out at home by parents, brothers, sisters or roommates. Other sources are public libraries and networks of friends.

Ease of access to the print media through home subscription does not always depend on the respondents' immediate circle. A small number subscribe to a major newspaper, on a daily or weekend basis, or to a weekly or monthly foreign newspaper. Some subscribe to several national and international newspapers.

26. « Mais quand on ne s'informe pas... j'avais vraiment l'impression que le monde tournait, mais j'étais vraiment l'exception. Le monde roulait et moi j'étais en dehors de ça ».

Many believe it does not cost much to be informed because of free access to various media.

[Translation] I have the impression that information is the least expensive thing in the world. It's true, being informed is what costs the least. There's so many ways of getting information that don't cost a cent²⁷ (MO 04-F, man, age 20).

I don't subscribe [to newspapers, magazines, etc]. I get it free if I can and if I can't get it, I'll find some other way of getting it free (VA 4, woman, age 19).

Others are of the opposite opinion, believing that being informed can be costly, when they want information about a specific subject covered by specialists or information from several sources to obtain different analytical points of view.

[Translation] Well, yes, it's expensive, because you have to read books, you have to read three opinions on the same subject to have a good understanding of it²⁸ (MO 03-F, woman, age 24).

The respondents' evaluation of media access indicates social disparities: although many brag about the abundance of media sources, others believe they are restricted. The opportunities offered by the educational and work environment, and possibly the socioeconomic conditions of the respondents and their parents, for those who still live at home, may be explanatory factors. For instance, not having a television, which is occasionally the case of students, is a significant restriction in light of the popularity of newscasts as a source of information.

Moreover, personal preferences for one medium over another have to be considered in the representation of media access. One young person may be satisfied with a newspaper distributed free of charge, while another aspires to consult more analytical, specialized content.

27. «J'ai l'impression que l'information, c'est ce qui nous coûte le moins cher dans le monde. C'est vrai, c'est ce qui coûte le moins cher de s'informer. Il y a tellement de méthodes de s'informer qui ne coûtent pas une cenne».

28. «Ben oui cela coûte cher, parce qu'il faut lire les livres et lire trois opinions sur le même sujet pour avoir une bonne compréhension».

Schedule

Constraints related to the respondents' schedule also have an impact on their practices. Requirements related to study, work or a combination of work and study are factors that restrict the time allocated to these practices. This was seen in the 1999 study done in the Montreal and Quebec City regions (Boily, 2000) to examine media use more closely by taking into account all activities in the lives of young people in this age group. Although scheduling constraints are not examined in detail in this research, they are clearly present for the respondents who work or study.

There are certain periods where there is so much work or so much study, and any reading required other than to get the job done is a complete luxury. Maybe it shouldn't be that way, but that's something that tends to be true (MO 07-E, man, age 24).

Certain respondents says that a full schedule and an excess of information accentuate the feeling of being "overloaded" and cause them to be more lax in obtaining information from the media.

It is a combination of both, it is just so much news, and we do not have time to do anything else and not enough time to grasp them (MO 06-E, man, age 24).

Lack of time is a reality expressed by respondents who want to be informed. Moreover, we can assume that being informed means several things. We therefore made an effort to determine its meaning.

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BEING INFORMED: WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE 18-24 AGE GROUP

A few decades ago, young people in the same cohort would have given a different definition of what it means to be informed, since today's broadcast and communication universe cannot be compared with that of other eras. Today's young people are aware that the current media universe offers a window on the

world and that, accordingly, being informed is no longer limited to knowing what happens in their immediate environment but extends to the entire planet.

A hundred years ago, being informed meant knowing about your community, and you knew nothing about the other side of the world. But now the world has become so much smaller and being informed is much broader now (MO 08-E, man, age 22).

The wide range of media sources and the many possibilities offered by the Internet are central to the changes evidenced by today's young people aged 18 to 24. Obtaining information from several sources that provide different analytical outlooks has become a common strategy, ensuring a comprehensive, unrestricted vision of current events. Being well informed even seems to depend on this multi-source approach, since it enhances the respondents' understanding of events and issues with the views of various authors.

[Translation] Since information has become a product, you have to be able to look at all the products on the market to form an opinion. I think that's become the description of someone who is well informed²⁹ (MO 01-F, man, age 21).

The search for information may therefore be guided by the rational logic of a well-informed consumer who looks for good products and compares them before making an enlightened choice. The analogy may appear to be simplistic, but essentially being well informed means identifying all the aspects of the situation before expressing an enlightened, fair opinion. Delving more deeply into the news is closely associated with this practice, since, in contrast, individuals who are not well informed are those who have very little knowledge of a subject and go rapidly onto another subject, or who limit themselves to one medium offering a brief overview of current events. Being well informed also means consulting more complete information sources.

29. « Puisque l'information est devenue un produit, tu dois être capable de regarder tous les produits sur le marché pour te faire une opinion. Je vois que c'est rendu comme cela la description de quelqu'un qui est bien informé ».

[Translation] Reading newspapers, watching the news, consulting different sources to compare them more effectively, and also there are sources of information that are more complete than others³⁰ (MO 03-F, man, age 23).

This type of rigorous behaviour seems to be accepted by many young people who, even if they have different levels of knowledge, adopt basic criteria regarding what it means to be well informed. Today, access to all sorts of media sources raises the question of the reliability of the sources and young people's degree of awareness of this matter. The comments made by certain respondents indicate that this aspect is important and cannot be separated from the desire for quality information, in other words content that presents real facts and an objective point of view. Being informed also seems to include the ability to assess the quality of media coverage by a given source and to be aware of the medium's ideological bias, from which it becomes possible to determine whether you are well informed or not.

Being informed and knowing where your information comes from. Just knowing how well informed you are is important. Because you can't be informed if you don't know how reliable your information is (VA 02, man, age 20).

I think it is being able to know about where you get your information and know that some sources are more dependable than other sources. It is about having an opinion about what a good source of information is, which you prefer and be able to back that up (MO 07-E, woman, age 21).

Apart from being aware of the characteristics of the information sources used, for many respondents being informed means being aware of what is happening in the world, aware of the realities of other cultures and peoples, and not restricting themselves to the immediate environment. For others, it means understanding what is happening around them and what may affect their daily life. Thus there are variations in what constitutes the reality of each individual. Differences are also apparent in the

30. « Lire les journaux, écouter les nouvelles, consulter différentes sources pour pouvoir mieux comparer et aussi il y a des sources plus complètes que d'autres dans l'information ».

degree of knowledge and skill deemed necessary to consider oneself well informed, since such representations depend on subjective criteria that may vary from one person to another. Being informed therefore takes several forms, possibly as much today as in the past.

I think we would be surprised at how little difference there is between generations. People just know what they feel they need to know (MO 06-E, woman, age 20).

The concept of “being informed” may thus vary in intensity. For some, being informed means having an idea of what is happening, without it being necessary to know subjects in detail or to express opinions. In certain cases, the social aspect becomes a leitmotiv, in that being informed makes an individual more confident in everyday conversation. For others, being informed means understanding what is happening, being able to discuss it, to debate it and to form one’s own opinion. This implies a store of general or in-depth knowledge of certain subjects that can be compared with the knowledge of others, since [translation] “discussion is essential for the advancement of information”³¹ (MO 03-F, woman, age 24).

Having an opinion or not having one is a divergence factor that gave rise to extremely interesting discussions by the participants. For some, having opinion is an automatic mechanism that arises from the knowledge they have acquired, whereas for others it’s an option that a person may or may not develop, after becoming informed about current events and issues. For others, it involves deriving meaning based on a personal analysis of the facts, while for still others it’s an opinion that is expressed by a medium and dovetails with their point of view. The concept of having an opinion did not give rise to unanimity, but the search for objectivity is a shared concern. It is apparent in various ways: being critical of the way they obtain information; looking for real facts; putting the information disseminated into context before forming an opinion; forming an opinion from reliable sources rather than basing it on hearsay; avoiding manipulation by corporate or political interests; and being aware of the interpretation that authors provide.

31. «La discussion est primordiale pour pouvoir faire avancer l’information ».

Finally, for a few respondents being informed also means playing an active role in the search for information, a role that may be associated with a citizen's duty to make decisions and to take resulting action (voting, consuming, getting involved in the community, etc.).

Generally speaking, the interviewees' concepts of what it means to be informed are to a certain extent related to habits adopted in daily life and their individual level of satisfaction in relation to what they feel it is necessary or not necessary to know. It depends on the competencies and aspirations of the individual.

[Translation] I imagine someone who reads [name of a tabloid] for 15 minutes in the morning must think he's informed, and someone who pores over all the newspapers in the world is also informed. There are several levels, and someone who is really informed will know that not all information is good, and will look for good information. Someone who's not really informed won't make the effort³² (MO 01-F, man, age 23).

For today's young people, being informed therefore means approaching content and information sources critically. It also involves being aware of current events. It remains to be seen whether they consider themselves informed.

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BEING INFORMED: SELF-EVALUATION THROUGH PRACTICES

The respondents were asked to think about their degree of knowledge of what is happening in Canada and elsewhere in the world. They looked at themselves and at their generation, and occasionally at society in general. Whether they say they are

32. «J'imagine que quelqu'un qui lit le [nom d'un tabloïd] quinze minutes le matin doit avoir l'idée qu'il est informé et quelqu'un qui ratisse tous les journaux autour du monde se trouve aussi informé. Il y a plusieurs niveaux et quelqu'un qui est vraiment informé va savoir que toute l'information n'est pas bonne, va chercher à savoir la bonne. Quelqu'un qui n'est pas vraiment informé ne va pas faire l'effort».

well informed or poorly informed depends on a social construct based on individual subjectivity.

A look at oneself

A majority of the respondents said they were moderately well informed, like the people in their circle. They said they were up-to-date on various current events, could hold a conversation about them and could (or could not) express opinions. For some, being informed is limited to knowing the broad outlines of current events, whereas for others it involves delving a little more deeply into the news.

Certain respondents said they were more informed than the average person, believing that they have a good level of knowledge, can establish connections between events and put them into context, and even express an idea about future developments. For some of them, however, this assessment depends not only on knowledge acquired but also on the quality and reliability of the information conveyed by the media. Doubts may remain about whether the social reality they derive from it is accurate.

[Translation] Being properly informed is almost a debatable issue itself. I have difficulty saying whether I'm well informed or poorly informed. How do I know if I have the right opinions, if I have the right facts?³³ (MO 01-F, man, age 21).

Other respondents said they were poorly informed and, in a few rare cases, very poorly informed. Some even professed a profound lack of interest in television newscasts, which is accompanied, however, by the rather paradoxical habit of occasionally watching the news on a television network they consider mediocre.

Generally, news is told in the most uninteresting ways, and they use the same tactics over and over again like we're twelve year olds. So I do often ignore it, or I only watch the worst [news channel] (TO 02, man, age 22).

33. «Être informé comme il faut, la question, c'est presque un débat comme tel. Mais moi j'ai de la misère à dire si je suis vraiment informé ou si je suis désinformé. Comment je sais si j'ai des bonnes opinions, si j'ai des bons faits».

Life cycle is a factor that seems to explain the respondents' attitude to information. A large number of them would like to be better informed and are planning to change their behaviour. Some say they have adopted new habits in recent years. In contrast, others do not plan to change their current behaviour, but expect their fields of interest to shift. Generally speaking, concerns related to their personal lives and careers are a hindrance for the time being, but it appears that experience, greater maturity and the start of a more structured, independent life will enable them to understand events and to adopt a routine.

Well, I would like to be [more informed] because it is part of being a well-rounded adult. I think that once I settle down, and am part of a different age pack, I will get the paper and see what is going on, live in my suburb (MO 08-E, woman, age 24).

Whether the respondents say they are well informed or poorly informed, the reasons they cite most frequently are their schedule and their interests, with very few citing a lack of money. Their lack of interest occasionally depends on personal laziness in the face of the effort required to become informed and occasionally on media coverage of events or issues deemed to have no impact on their daily reality: "Probably because it doesn't affect me directly, but if I'm really interested, I would follow it up everyday" (VA 03, woman, age 19). One young man even sees this phenomenon as a reflection of current society, in which personal interests take precedence over collective interests. A few respondents are even of the opinion that the degree of interest in current events has a direct impact on the time spent to become informed, and that certain people use lack of time as an excuse for their lack of interest. That effectively describes a type of behaviour that certain respondents expressed openly.

Looking more closely, we see that a lack of interest is related to several factors: a lack of factual or historic knowledge needed to understand current events and place them in context; a lack of understanding of events if the practice is not constant; a lack of concise information that presents only the essentials; media coverage of an often depressing reality that prompts them to seek entertainment; repetition of the same subjects, such as the sponsorship scandal; and mistrust of the news, which according

to some often reflects the position of an opinion leader. We must conclude that the lack of interest stems partially from a lack of personal motivation and partially from mistrust of the current media product.

As for the respondents' degree of knowledge of current events, it appears to vary from one subject to another depending on their interests and motivation. Certain interests are closely related to their studies and jobs, whereas others stem from personal curiosity or sensitivity to social or political issues. Occasionally their motivation seems to stem from courses they have taken, which have given them a desire to understand and look critically at the news, or is the result of the influence of family members or peers.

[Translation] Because I really had to be pushed, because I really wasn't interested. But as a result of being pushed I'm informed, I really got interested and I feel like doing it more³⁴ (MO 03-F, woman, age 21).

Moreover, positive social pressure, which is vague but very real, is one factor that prompts young adults to keep up with what is happening in the world. "I think there is actually a fundamental rightness to being informed..." (MO 06-E, man, age 24). This "social rectitude," which encourages them to become informed, is evident through sociability: taking part in conversations, being able to defend an opinion, not looking stupid in a group of friends or in class, etc.

Being informed thus appears to involve a very important social aspect that could be a sufficiently powerful incentive to prompt a young person to at least take the time to become informed about the day's major events. Many say that, to be well informed, it needs to make an effort, to use several sources and to read about a range of subjects. For certain respondents, however, the degree of people's knowledge cannot be measured by reading the newspaper or watching the news, because certain people who are very well informed use the media as a secondary source of information.

34. « Parce qu'il a vraiment fallu que l'on me pousse dans le dos, parce que j'avais vraiment pas d'intérêt. Et à force de me faire pousser dans le dos, je me suis informée, j'ai vraiment pris goût et j'ai envie de le faire plus ».

In fact, the people who I usually respect the most and who have the most to say intelligently about these subjects read mostly books, and the media is just a secondary source (TO 02, man, age 22).

A look at their generation

It is often said that today's young people are less informed than they used to be, vote less than older adults, read the newspaper less, etc. The respondents are divided about this subject.

A certain number of respondents say the current generation is less well informed, citing their age group's lack of interest in politics or partiality to entertainment programs. In certain cases, the difficulty of attracting their attention is due to the character traits of the current generation, which was reared in the context of information that is instantaneous, diversified, virtually stimulating and eye-catching.

I think it comes to a good point about our attention span [...] If we can hold my attention for anywhere between three to five to 10 minutes at most, then I am not going to stay informed, or I'm going to switch channels, or I'm going to switch to another article or move on. I don't think it has do to with not wanting to be informed, it's just that our generation, or our age group – [and our] low attention span –, we need something to keep us going. And to keep us wanting to stay informed (VA 02, man, age 23).

An equivalent number believe, however, that this generation is more informed, citing the fact that today's young people are more sensitized to current events. It seems that the higher level of education has a positive effect on this generation, which attaches a great deal of importance to being informed about what is happening in Canada and elsewhere in the world.

I guess it just depends on what it is and for my peer group, I think that we're all very informed, especially because we're going to school [university] and we're choosing to be informed and I think it's important (TO 04, woman, age 24).

A larger number of respondents believe that the current generation is as informed as the preceding one, since it has access to many sources of information and is encouraged to form opinions and to express them in secondary school.

I know, myself, I've always been somewhat informed, and high school is one of the places where you're most encouraged to make opinions on the news. So, young people are encouraged to read up on current events. They may not have the political background, or the background in general, and the history of events, but they form the fastest opinions on events, I'd say. So, they're definitely informed. They may not have the depth on the issue, but they're informed (TO 04, man, age 24).

Many respondents are of the opinion that indicators such as voting in elections or reading newspapers should not be used to gauge young people's interest in public affairs. Indeed, of the various media sources used by the respondents, the Internet occupies an important place, not for leisure purposes but for information searches.

[Translation] The fact that only 25 % of young people vote does not reflect [whether they're informed or not], but their motivation, their confidence in the existing political system. [...] People are buying fewer newspapers... I can get information free on greenpeace.org. There are lots of things that have more to say [a reference to content] and are accessible. It takes more search time, but I won't necessarily have the option of [name of a newspaper owner]³⁵ (MO 01-F, man, age 23).

35. « Le fait que les jeunes ne votent qu'à 25 %, cela ne reflète pas [s'ils sont informés ou pas], mais leur motivation, leur confiance dans le système politique actuel. [...] Les gens achètent moins de journaux... je peux m'informer sur greenpeace.org gratuitement. Il y a plein de choses qui ont plus à dire [il fait référence au contenu], accessibles. Ça prend plus de temps de recherche, mais je n'aurai pas nécessairement l'option de [nom d'un propriétaire de journal] ».

CHAPTER 3

A look at the media

In this chapter, the respondents' representations of the media are analyzed in relation to various aspects of media coverage and, more specifically, to information content and format, as well as the role of the media. The results show what the respondents think of information quality and reliability, their level of trust in various information sources (media and journalists), their preference for descriptive or analytical content and the impact of certain factors related to information format (presentation, tone, esthetics) in their choice of a medium or content. Moreover, their representations of the current role of the media provide a better understanding of their expectations of the role that the media should play in society.

MEDIA COVERAGE

The respondents look critically at media coverage in terms of the events and issues that make headlines or round out daily coverage as well as the various interests that govern the information market.

Selection of news

The respondents are well aware that each medium's decisions regarding what it covers, what it puts on the front page and what

makes headlines are based on marketing considerations (program ratings, newspaper circulation, etc.), in line with the requirements of the corporations that own it and its advertisers.

Certain respondents believe that the media generally cover a wide range of subjects, and that the diversity of media sources meets everyone's needs.

[Translation] I think information is fairly well presented and in that we have a good, diversified choice. In Quebec alone, for example, there are information sources for all tastes³⁶ (MO 02-F, woman, age 23).

I think they're pretty good personally (VA 05, man, age 21).

Others say that the media do not provide adequate coverage of subjects that aren't flashy enough to attract viewers or readers (for example, events in Africa) or that relate to social and environmental issues that the community needs to be aware of (such as poverty in the world, sustainable and renewable energy sources). In addition, many are highly critical of the importance placed on inconsequential news items, either on television or in conventional newspapers, in comparison with the quantity of serious information that could be covered in greater depth. The order in which news is presented on newscasts or in newspapers appears to show that more sensational information pleases the masses who, in their opinion, want to be entertained. Today, information therefore seems to be taking the form of entertainment, reflecting the entertainment society we live in. The result is content that lacks quality and depth.

They still have to get ratings; they have to draw in viewers in order to stay on the air, type of thing. So, it's not just them relaying objective information. Their primary goal is not to get people informed; it's more to provide something that is going to entertain people, and suck in viewers (TO 03, woman, age 18).

36. « Moi je trouve que l'information est quand même bien présentée et que l'on a un bon choix, diversifié. Juste au Québec, par exemple, des sources d'informations, il y en a pour tous les goûts ».

Many said they wanted media coverage of international news to equal that of national news. Young people's openness to the world and the ability to cover the news throughout the world at the speed of light are raising the expectations of young people, who are increasingly educated and travel when they feel like it, either for recreation or humanitarian purposes. The symbolic closeness of the continents may change their relationship to space and give rise to a global conscience, which leads some to consider themselves citizens of the world. For instance, a recent survey on migration involving 5,997 Quebecers aged 20 to 34 indicates that 68.5 % of them consider themselves citizens of the world "somewhat" or "to a great extent."³⁷ Their interest in international news and their commitment on this level is therefore not surprising. As for coverage of national news, their degree of satisfaction with specific aspects is lower, in the case of the respondents in Toronto and Vancouver. In Toronto, respondents deplored the lack of information about other major Canadian cities and excessive concentration on news about their own city. The presence of many television stations seems to be a factor.

I grew up in a small town in Ontario, and for local news there was nothing. It was all Toronto. So, it really depends on where you live. We could only learn about the news by talking to your friends and family (TO 01, man, age 22).

Some respondents in Vancouver said that coverage may be different in the East and in the West of the country as a result of more pronounced American coverage, more limited coverage of social issues or the lack of comprehensive coverage, as certain areas of the city were not adequately covered by the media, which are concerned about meeting the expectations of an affluent population. They seem to be referring here to the local press.

I don't know why there isn't more media coverage of what's going on. I would like to see more media coverage, and I

37. From a survey conducted by Groupe de recherche sur la migration des jeunes in 2004-2005 with the findings to be available in the winter of 2006. Consult the site of Observatoire Jeunes et Société: <<http://www.obsjeunes.ca>>.

think I'd like to see areas more fully represented in the Lower Mainland (VA 04, woman, age 20).

This dissatisfaction with Canadian media coverage leads them, as we have already seen, to turn more to international news.

Quality of media coverage

For many respondents, the order in which a medium presents the news is indicative of the quality of its coverage. The quality varies from one medium to another because it depends on various interests: the government, private enterprise and the owners. Marketing imperatives are the reasons for selection of eye-catching subjects that sell well, repetition of news as long as it attracts attention, sensationalist treatment of certain subjects and the structure of newscasts, which present the most important subjects at the end, in order to keep viewers watching. To these constraints are added competition between the media and the public's tastes. Information is above all a product that has to satisfy the masses.

[Translation] [...] they have to be sure that lots of people watch [the news]. They don't show news that is boring. They show news that everyone will watch, and they put it on the front page to get people to buy newspapers, not because it's good for them, not because it's what people need to know³⁸ (MO 01-F, man, age 21).

Most of the respondents are aware that certain media cover current events in greater depth while others provide superficial coverage and abuse their power to sell any type of news, to exaggerate an event, to distort the news, to shock the public with human tragedy, etc.

The degree of satisfaction depends on the respondents' expectations. For example, if we take news broadcasts, which are popular with the respondents, we find opposing opinions: on

38. « [...] il faut qu'ils s'assurent que plein de monde l'écoute [la nouvelle]. Ils ne diront pas des nouvelles qui sont plates. Ils vont dire des nouvelles que tout le monde va écouter, qu'il faut qu'ils mettent en première page, faire ce que le monde va acheter, non pas ce qui est bon pour eux, pas ce que les gens doivent savoir ».

the one hand, the current structure allows very little time for each subject so that the largest possible number of daily news items deemed important can be covered, which prevents adequate coverage; on the other hand, the length is sometimes excessive because the same subject is repeated. The degree of satisfaction with media coverage therefore varies from one respondent to another.

* * *

INFORMATION AND ITS CONTENT

The respondents have different views about content quality, just as they do for media coverage. They frequently cite the matter of reliability of media content.

Content quality

From the outset, we can state that Canadian media have a better reputation with the respondents than the American media. Information from Canadian sources is in their opinion of better quality; they cite the way the news is handled, the greater diversity of viewpoints and content that is less commercial and less sensationalist.

[...] but I personally feel that I still trust my Canadian broadcasters more than I trust American broadcasters. At least if you watch Canadian news, they will go international, they will talk about what's going on in the rest of the world. Watching American broadcasts, it's nothing but local (VA 02, man, age 23).

A number of respondents said they were generally satisfied with the news that is presented and believe that the description of facts enables a satisfactory level of understanding. Information on matters of broad interest generally seems to be of fairly good quality, but this is less true for more specific subjects.

For me, I am satisfied by the news that is of broad interest. Something that a lot of people are interested in, I am satisfied with the comprehension I get. But let's say about things

that are less broad, like tax policies, I see so much misinformation, simply because I have the knowledge to be able to judge on that issue (MO 07-E, man, age 24).

Others say that the content does not always give a complete presentation of the facts and the reasons for the various positions taken by the protagonists.

I don't think there's a problem with getting information, the information is easier to get today than it's ever been before. But it's like covering an issue is not a problem, but correctly covering it, that's what the problem is. In an unbiased fashion, that's what's lacking (VA 05, man, age 21).

To which some reply that no medium can offer a complete picture of the facts and present all possible interpretations.

Yeah, I think, just, looking at media in general, it's just not possible for any source to have all of the perspectives. I think that's, and even that phrase "all of the perspectives," when you say that, there's probably gonna be another perspective that you can add onto that anyway. So it's sort of like self-defeating (VA 01, man, age 20).

A good number of the respondents are concerned about the fact that the media present what is important to them, what they consider to be of public interest, on the basis of their own interests. The media seemed to be proposing their own way of looking at the world, by overestimating certain facts and by underestimating others. That's why a certain degree of control over content quality seems reassuring to them, as is the case for newspapers and television. Unfortunately this is not the case for many Web sites.

Although the respondents agree that the media provide access to a multitude of information, they take two diametrically opposed positions on the possible impact of access to so much information on content quality. Some think that proximity to news in terms of accessibility increases the amount of quality information, since journalists' ability to directly witness events and issues, around the world, allows them to report the facts more accurately. Others believe that this information is not necessarily of good quality despite the large quantity of it available to the public, mainly because of the lack of control over the

Internet or because of certain media monopolies that tend to homogenize information.

[Translation] No matter what you read, it always comes back to the same thing. Whether it's on the Internet, the headlines on the Internet or in a newspaper, it may be in more or less depth, but it's the exact same thing presented three different ways³⁹ (MO 03-F, woman, age 19).

Finally, many participants believe that current information often gives a negative presentation of the world. Examples are major headlines for human tragedies and personal dramas, rather than more positive developments, such as scientific discoveries and personal achievements.

They are divided about the quality of media coverage and news content. They believe that content quality goes hand in hand with reliability.

Content reliability

Quality information exists, but you have to look for it. Each medium is trying to construct its own niche in the information market, according to many respondents who have developed a critical attitude towards content, authors and sources.

The meaning that the respondents give to information is that of content that describes facts in the most objective and most complete way possible. But in the eyes of many respondents the information provided by the media is often partial, reflecting a single point of view or a single analytical standpoint. They often say that information is biased because it presents only one analytical angle and only one viewpoint, which are based on ideology, political partisanship or a national vision. This "bias," which takes many forms, will later be the subject of a specific analysis of their level of trust in journalists and the media. We can already state, however, that a large number of the respondents are skeptical about the news, which they regard as more subjective than objective.

39. «N'importe quoi que tu lises, ça revient toujours à la même chose. Que ce soit Internet, les manchettes sur Internet ou dans le journal, ça va peut-être être plus ou moins approfondi, mais ce sera copié collé en trois façons différentes».

So, you really do have to be careful, because it's not objective information. It is very subjective, and there is underlying intentions as to the way they relay information. So, yes, it is overwhelming, because you don't feel like you can turn on the TV and really depend on true, vital information (TO 03, woman, age 18).

If some are severe in their judgment of the way the media inform people, others are prepared to consider limitations involving time and money that are imposed on the media, and believe that the individual who wants to be well informed should assume part of the responsibility.

To ensure they obtain information that is as objective as possible, some seek out points of view that are in opposition to those of the mainstream media, turning to alternative media, especially newspapers. That does not necessarily mean that all these respondents believe such content is more reliable: some maintain a critical approach, while others are more favourable. They appreciate the creative, sarcastic and interesting treatment provided by these media, as well as their critical approach or the greater freedom of expression that their independent status confers.

[Translation] The more you get into the alternative media, where the bosses are independent, the more you'll find true information⁴⁰ (MO 05-F, woman, age 21).

Others stop consulting these media after encountering an attitude that is just as partisan as that of the traditional media. In brief, neutrality is a quality criterion that many are looking for and that prompts them to be concerned about identifying the author of an article to assess content quality: they appreciate certain journalists or put greater stock in the viewpoints of experts.

In addition, the role of opinions in information created a debate among the respondents: does quality information contain opinions or not? The representations are varied: a) the best

40. « Plus tu vas dans les médias alternatifs, où les « boss » sont indépendants, plus on va voir une information vraie ».

content provides a complete, objective description of the facts, an analysis and an opinion; b) information has to be limited to the facts and the individual forms his or her own opinion; c) an opinion naturally rounds out information; and d) an opinion creates a bias, which may influence the individual. Thus an opinion often represents a loss of objectivity rather than being considered one element of an analysis that takes consideration of the news a little further. Clearly, the concern on the part of many respondents about forming their own opinion on the basis of reliable, objective material in such a vast information market indicates the uncertainty that exists regarding the quality of the information offered by the media. Certain media practices or certain personal observations support these concerns: consultation of articles from other media (occasionally foreign) to round out coverage; the presence of preconceived ideas in certain information programs; the emphasis that is often placed on form (sensationalism) rather than substance (in-depth coverage); and the need to disseminate daily information in a short period on the basis of the day's events.

Finally, the tone with which news is presented and the words used can create a bias in that the emotion expressed through the news and the intensity of the words can have a persuasive effect on the population. Impartiality in the transmission of information seems to be achieved only with factual information. And, for certain individuals, "to inform" has a very restrictive meaning: it means to provide the basic facts but not to interpret them. This fairly narrow vision of information seems to be exacerbated by the presence of major capitalist corporations in the media universe.

We can assume that the critical sense of today's young people is increasing at the same time as their level of education and as a result of their access to all types of media. Still, that does not mean that all of them are critical of the information they receive, but a good number of them insist on information worthy of its name. These young people are also influenced by current opinion, which denounces certain journalistic practices and may affect their representation of the media and content. Another factor is the influence of family, which is always powerful and which is expressed in their behaviours and practices, as we saw in the chapter on the information sources they use. We must

bear in mind that the current generation consists of the sons and daughters of baby boomers, who are themselves educated, critical and demanding.

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LEVEL OF TRUST IN INFORMATION SOURCES

The respondents' level of trust in media sources was analyzed, with a distinction drawn between their vision of the media as institutions and of journalists as practitioners. The representation of the major media institutions is rather negative.

Level of trust in the media

Young people's level of trust in the media is variable. First, there is a category of young people who generally trust information without being concerned about the reliability of their media sources. A second category of young people have a certain degree of trust in information, while maintaining a critical attitude toward sources. Finally, a third category of young people generally mistrust information and systematically consult various sources to check the accuracy of information. This checking is of course limited to subjects they consider of great importance. Thus we see on the part of a large number of respondents a common attitude toward the media, that of "healthy" skepticism, which they attribute to the presence of "bias" in media coverage and content (bias being a term used frequently during the interviews). Theirs is a healthy skepticism, since it seems to enable them to remain critical of the current information market. They regard as "bias" any attitude toward information or any information that is not objective, that does not present all aspects of a fact, that does not offer a range of viewpoints and that may be used as a tool of persuasion.

One of the biases cited is the interests of large private corporations. A majority of the young people believe that multinationals' control over information is a determining factor in media coverage, which reflects above all their private interests and not those of the community. They believe there is censorship of

media coverage and content, through the choice of news that is covered or the way it is covered, since multinationals are interested primarily in profits and emphasize what appeals to the public. The media also operate on the basis of a corporate culture geared to profitability and earnings growth. Since government-owned media are not exempt from financial constraints, they believe all media are at the mercy of advertising and revenues from the private sector, which causes advertising time to be allocated at the expense of informative content. Moreover, since the first objective is to maintain readership or audience share, they feel that certain practices are repeated endlessly to attract the public's attention, such as opinion surveys, open lines, interviews of the public or other means that, in reality, do not always provide information that enables users to understand issues and events.

[...] what they are doing is not selling news, they are selling you to the advertisers. You pay a certain amount to buy it, but most of the revenues come from advertising. Is there some type of information that is portrayed in a flashy way because of that? Probably yes. Because it is more comfortable to buy a new Ford or SUV if you are not thinking about global warming. There is no conspiracy, but things reflect those commercial interests. And this goes for radio, TV and print (MO 07-E, man, age 24).

Thus many are critical of Canada's media universe, the impact on information quality and the role of the media, an aspect we will cover later. A few even wonder whether true access to information still exists when the information tools are controlled by a handful of individuals.

I think owners of news, any media, have the right to own many media. I am a believer of free market. On the other hand, I believe that a free market functions when there is no monopoly (MO 07-E, man, age 24).

The situation prompts many to look for information from various sources and try to identify media owners so that they can critically assess the information provided. For instance, a number of respondents consult both traditional and alternative newspapers. This practice of consulting several sources does not mean that information should be rejected, but that it is possible to be

poorly informed and that they want to know about the interests of journalists and those who pay them. Certain media are deemed more credible than others as a result of the reliability of their information content, whether because of their reputation or because the respondents have checked the reliability by comparing content with other sources. It should be noted that an independent newspaper may be considered reliable but that doesn't necessarily mean it is read.

We see that it is difficult for young people to distinguish between true and false, since that requires a fairly high level of knowledge. It is also difficult for young people to trust the media when the prevalent opinions regarding the media are negative.

I think a lot of what's going on now for us is we're hearing about all of the bias things that are going on in the media. Don't trust this person, there is all this outside information and influence. I think it makes it really hard to know who to trust, and that can really screw with a person's mind, if all you're hearing about is the media is lying to you (VA 02, man, age 23).

Media financed by the government are in their opinion less affected by commercial interests, but subject to censorship of another type, especially in matters involving politics. Despite these constraints, the government's presence in the information universe seems to reassure them. Some respondents repeatedly said they believed the quality of the content on government networks was superior.

[Translation] [...] you get a different point of view from private enterprise⁴¹ (MO 01-F, man, age 23).

I would feel better if it was publicly funded. [...] Like if news programs were publicly funded, instead of being funded by readership and advertising (VA 02, man, age 24).

Certain respondents may believe that alternative newspapers belonging to not-for-profit organizations are more objective since they have no commercial purpose.

41. « [...] on peut avoir un point de vue différent de l'entreprise privée ».

[Translation] Just now you were talking about underground newspapers, I'm sure they are more direct, because the underground world is more direct. If we had underground TV, if we had the choice, I might watch it. It would be more straightforward, more realistic, with better quality⁴² (MO 05-F, man, age 19).

If some are inclined to believe so, others think that any medium has a line of thought that is reflected in information, that any information is based on a way of understanding and interpreting reality, and that certain types of content express opinions more strongly than others, but that all contain an opinion, however negligible.

I guess it's just the way people see things. It's happened all throughout history. People present information and someone else presents his interpretation (TO 04, man, age 24).

The intensity of their criticism varies, since some speak of manipulation of information while others talk about differences in the handling of information. Knowing whom to believe is becoming a genuine problem in this labyrinth of information, especially when they consider that they themselves have become a consumer product: "I just think our age is tired of being sold to... over-consumption maybe?" (TO 01, woman, age 23).

Common practice appears to show that current events are generally presented from a particular point of view. That is why they would like to see a clear demarcation between fact and analysis based on personal opinions, so that people can make a distinction.

I have to say that when it comes to actually sourcing out, I try to de-media myself. Because there's a few people on a few places that I do actually trust, but for years I only got the feedback in forms of other people's opinions, and I thought that was really misrepresenting what was really going on, and I felt really disenfranchised from a lot of the issues that were

42. «Vous parliez tantôt des journaux "underground", je suis sûr que c'est plus direct, parce que le monde "underground", c'est plus direct. S'ils avaient la télé "underground", si on avait le choix, j'écouterai peut-être ça. Plus droit, plus réaliste, plus de qualité».

really actually close to me. So I think that's why I've always tried to just get as close to the source as I can and research about everything as possible (VA 04, woman, age 20).

In their opinion, the existence of major corporations that control several media or have a monopoly constitutes a major bias, because this leads to uniformity in reporting the news and a single analytical perspective from media controlled by the same owners: "One perspective and one censorship form" (VA 02, woman, age 20). This media concentration is perceived as very high in North America and even more so in Quebec, judging by the number of Montreal respondents who referred to it. The print media as well as television appear to be especially affected by this convergence, which ultimately undermines information quality.

[Translation] It's exasperating. I find it incredible that something as basic as information, the information we use as citizens... that information is left in the hands of a few people. It's an industry like any other⁴³ (MO 02-F, man, age 24).

Political ideology is another form of bias they believe has an impact on information. Some respondents, especially in Montreal, are sensitive to the various political viewpoints that serve as guidelines for the media. They feel that being able to identify the political ideology (for example, sovereigntist or federalist) underlying information makes it possible to better understand journalists' points of view and the basis of their arguments. They also believe that consumers select the source that suits their ideas, such as the political ideology of a newspaper.

Level of trust in journalists

Judging by the comments made, journalists are regarded more positively than the media, where the power structure is found. The respondents tended to be less critical of journalists. We can

43. « Cela m'horripile. Je trouve cela incroyable que l'on conçoive quelque chose d'aussi fondamental que l'information, l'information c'est à partir de cela que l'on peut être citoyen... que l'information soit laissée dans les mains de quelques-uns. C'est une industrie comme les autres »,

also state that a certain number of respondents who are less informed about current events have no specific opinion on this matter. The respondents appear to have difficulty determining who decides the priorities of media coverage and how journalists go about selecting a subject and presenting it, so that it will not be rejected by the owners (corporate sponsors). Very few of them understand the control mechanisms that extend from owners to news anchors or news editors.

Those who had something to say about this matter seem to believe, from the outset, that journalists are the last link in the chain and that they have to comply with their employers' requirements. They cannot go against the line of conduct adopted by a medium without running the risk of damaging their careers. The firing of the journalist who wrote *Livre noir du Canada anglais*⁴⁴ is a case in point. The pressure on journalists seems to become stronger as the pool of employers shrinks with the advent of large monopolies. The result could be a dangerous disappearance of the will to provide in-depth coverage, regardless of the consequences. The occupation of journalist may be tarnished as a result.

[Translation] I think people who have become journalists haven't done so to report stupid stuff, like someone has got themselves killed. I think they [wanted to talk about] social issues or they wanted to inform people. I myself might've studied journalism, but I told myself it would lead to nothing because even if I want to talk about lots of subjects, I wouldn't be able to because everything is controlled by people who don't want to hear about those things⁴⁵ (MO 04-F, man, age 20).

44. *Le livre noir du Canada anglais*, by Normand Lester, published by Les Intouchables in 2001.

45. «Je pense que ceux qui sont devenus journalistes ne sont pas devenus journalistes pour raconter des niaiseries, que quelqu'un s'est fait tuer. Je pense qu'ils avaient [envie de parler] soit des enjeux sociaux ou l'envie de vouloir informer les gens. Moi-même, j'aurais envie d'étudier en journalisme, mais je me dis que ça ne donne rien parce que même si j'ai envie de parler de pleins de sujets, je ne pourrais pas parce que tout est contrôlé par ceux qui ne veulent pas en entendre parler».

Some believe that journalists are generally people of integrity, who are interested in their occupation and work to inform the public. Others have only partial trust, which depends on several factors. It is greater, for example, in the case of a journalist who has a good reputation, has received awards, seems to be impartial and writes good articles.

Conversely, some expressed a feeling of mistrust regarding the expression of opinions that are personal or reflect a political party, flashy treatment of the news, distortion of reality as a result of a failure to understand a subject, use of interview quotations taken out of context or selection of information that presents only one facet of an event or an issue.

I don't think they'll [journalists] alter stories or purposely alter stories. [...] they'll be selective in what they include and what they omit in a story. Because they understand that this is what people want to see. They'll find the most striking aspect of the story, if it's a murder, if it's a specific political scandal, and then they'll zoom in on it very closely and they'll just look into that. And so, the closer you go into it, the more stuff you're leaving out (VA 01, man, age 20).

Control over information quality by people in the profession is a tool that fortunately dictates journalistic ethics, but this control is limited. According to one young woman, journalistic ethics cannot control a certain type of propaganda that is socially acceptable from a normative standpoint:

[Translation] You can engage in white propaganda and black propaganda. You don't have the right to use black propaganda; you can't manipulate information or say something that's not true. But with white propaganda you distort information to suit yourself, and that's all right⁴⁶ (MO 03-F, woman, age 19).

46. « Tu peux faire de la propagande blanche et de la propagande noire. La propagande noire tu n'as pas le droit, tu ne peux pas manipuler l'information ou dire ce qui n'est pas vrai. Mais avec la propagande blanche, tu déformes l'information juste pour dire ce qui fait ton affaire et ça c'est correct ».

The relationship of mistrust regarding, above all, media institutions contributes to the use of several media sources.

* * *

INFORMATION AND ITS FORMAT

For many respondents, the format of a medium does not determine their use of it. If they like reading the news and they like newspapers, for instance, they maintain their interest even if they find the newspaper too thick. The format of informative content (be it descriptive or analytical) has a perceptible impact on the television programs they watch or the articles they read.

Content structure

Each medium presents certain advantages. Here are three visions of this: television has an advantage over newspapers because you can quickly change the channel if the news doesn't interest you; newspapers allow you to select the news that interests you, unlike television, which obliges the individual to wait until a particular news item is broadcast; and the Internet offers the advantage of access to a multitude of sources. Thus each medium attracts its own audience.

As for content structure, the question pertains mainly to television and newspapers. Generally speaking, concise information that gives a good idea of the subject seems to be more appealing. The length should be proportional to the subject: there's no point in dragging a subject out needlessly but at the same time you can't convey the essential aspects of a subject in two minutes.

As for television newscasts, the order in which local, national and international news is presented is generally appealing. On the one hand, some respondents like the concept of a daily summary of events and issues that meets certain expectations but, on the other hand, some are dissatisfied with information deemed too brief as a result of the need to cover as many subjects as possible in a short period. Concise content seems to be important for those who say they have a short time span and are used to seeing a message conveyed in images in only a few minutes.

I don't have the attention span to read the newspaper, but I'll read like ten popup pages in a row, just because they're talking about different things. I grew up with commercials. A three-minute story is fine for me [...] (VA 02, man, age 24).

The appeal of news features, documentaries, public affairs programs and talk shows is limited. The respondents like them, dislike them or aren't even aware of them! In reality, the degree to which they watch these programs depends on their schedules or may be the result of channel surfing. The attraction lies, however, in a format that allows viewers to go beyond the facts and gain a deeper understanding of issues. Documentaries and news features are, however, considered effective tools of persuasion – especially documentaries in their recent incarnation as feature films – since they can be used to present the author's point of view and influence the general public. Once this aspect is acknowledged, this type of content is perceived as a good way of expressing points of view that would not otherwise be conveyed.

They'll give you perhaps more in-depth coverage on the story. But, as well, it's a double-edged sword; they will also come from a more, a more extreme perspective on whatever scale you're looking at (VA 01, man, age 20).

As for newspapers, concise articles attract those who like to obtain information when they're on the go. Reading the free newspapers distributed in the Montreal and Toronto subways seems to be a habit for many respondents. Some consider the content too superficial to be an adequate source of information, but for others it offers a daily dose of information that fits easily into their schedule and otherwise could be even more limited. Another positive aspect is the separate sections that allow readers to quickly find the information they're looking for. As for negative aspects, some respondents are critical of the emphasis on large headlines accompanied by short articles that often provide only a vague understanding. Once again, marketing strategy seems to take priority over content quality.

The appeal of descriptive content that presents facts objectively is perceptible. It is preferred over analytical content when

respondents are hesitant about content containing opinions that may influence people.

I prefer factual for sure. Analytic [content], people put their own opinions and their own spins to it, especially if it's a really long article. You'll be reading along, and the facts are there. All of a sudden, you get sort of drawn into it, and the writer's almost convincing you... (VA 05, woman, age 21).

Some seem to distinguish between an article that presents facts and an editorial that leads them to reflect on the issue from an analytical perspective since it's up to the individual to pass judgment on the author's position. For young people whose level of information is moderate or limited, the work of constructing a social reality may seem laborious given the complexity of the subjects covered by information specialists. It appears that some have more personal and social resources than others to help them become well informed and grasp the meaning of the news analyzed.

Presentation and tone

The way an information program is presented and the tone used can contribute to the appeal of certain programs. Interviews in the form of televised debates appeal to many because they see them as an opportunity to familiarize themselves with several points of view on the same subject. A program that is well prepared appeals to them, whether the style is serious, amusing or satirical. Some respondents even go so far as to state that a sarcastic, creative, humorous approach is intended especially to attract young people. Talk show-style programs that take a satirical approach are popular with many English-speaking respondents for the following reasons: the tone is amusing and accessible to all; the content may be exaggerated and biased – the bias is explicit – but it presents another way of thinking about a subject; the style is geared more to raising questions about current events rather than purporting to state the truth; and predominant ideas are given humorous treatment. They feel that the humorous, satirical approach gives the program host greater freedom of expression to broach aspects that other types of program would not allow. They believe that this light style requires greater ability on the part of the host to argue various subjects and on the

part of viewers to understand the various analytical perspectives. With this type of program, obtaining information through entertainment is a given, and some are more inclined to believe the information discussed on such shows.

And I am more trusting of that information [talk-show on American politics] because they are not taking a "this is true stance" attitude. They are mocking some of the ideas. I am more likely to believe that (MO 08-E, woman, age 24).

Basically, it uses a lot of irony, which presupposes that the viewer understands both the left- and right-wing views of whatever they're mocking. So, it is a smarter form of television, and it asks more from its viewers... He is very clever and skeptical of what the government says (TO 01, man, age 22).

According to many respondents, the media are familiar with the characteristics of their target audiences. For example, they know how to attract a certain clientele with various stratagems, such as injecting entertainment into information programs to turn them into a show. They believe this format is perfectly appropriate for a talk show but not for a newscast, which should provide a serious presentation that draws attention only to the content of the news. Television is especially cited for informational content that is increasingly taking the form of entertainment, based on very short visual clips, owing to a context of competition between several networks as well as imperatives created by market studies indicating that people want to be entertained rather than informed. In their opinion, these shows are more prevalent in the United States than in Canada. They are full of stratagems and they broadcast the most exciting, most dramatic news in ways that call to mind mini films.

The respondents are divided about the presence of emotion in news reporting: either they prefer a neutral tone, which keeps from an *a priori* interpretation of the news, or they like an expression of moderate empathy that adds a human dimension to the presentation of the news. In brief, the respondents' preferences may be heterogeneous, as is the case of those attracted by a certain type of presentation, an oral and written style of expression, etc. For example, some respondents said that they appreciate a program host who is lively, serious and credible and

that he or she plays a major role in attracting an audience, especially for newscasts. Presentation is such an important factor that it may cause form to take precedence over substance. In other words, if they don't like the host or the anchor, they change the channel.

As for the tone taken by the print media, the respondents had few comments, although content quality is very important to them and a good article may inspire them to read future articles by the same writer.

Esthetic considerations

Although television is especially cited when it comes to presentation, newspapers are even more so when it comes to esthetic considerations. Generally speaking, esthetic considerations are not a major criterion for media use. The respondents may be sensitive to graphic design without it being a selection criterion. They may like the smaller format of a tabloid but read a broadsheet, because reading a newspaper is a daily ritual.

[Translation] To me, a newspaper is a world that I open up. I like having a nice big newspaper and opening it up⁴⁷ (MO 05-F, woman, age 21).

Some are not affected by such considerations, while others are less attracted by a broadsheet with sections that are difficult to handle. Some hold views diametrically opposed to the one cited above.

[Translation] For sure, when you have a page that's two or three feet square, you don't look at all of it, you get lost, for sure. I mean I personally get lost. For sure. If the page is too long, you get discouraged by all those words. If you're even the least bit tired, you'll get even more tired⁴⁸ (MO 05-F, man, age 22).

47. « Mais pour moi, un journal, c'est un monde que j'ouvre et que j'aime voir le beau grand journal qui est là, que j'ouvre ».

48. « C'est sûr que quand tu as une page qui fait deux pieds ou trois pieds carrés, tu ne regardes pas partout, t'en perds, c'est certain. Je veux dire, moi personnellement, j'en perds. C'est certain. Une page qui est trop longue, c'est décourageant, tu vois plein de mots. Il suffit que tu sois le moins fatigué pour l'être encore plus ».

Moreover, the layout of newspaper articles is important, especially the way they are organized. It's important to be able to quickly find the continuation of the article you're reading. In addition, the professionalism of a medium is, in the respondents' opinion, reflected in the way content is organized. This may also be a criterion when they select sources on the Internet.

It is the professional format of the page. When it is not professional, you smell it: this is not quite "legit"! I go to many different sources and I think that it is very much a gut feeling, whether it is organized, how expensive it is, if there are archives, whether the content of information is adjudicated in any way. I do my homework (MO 07-E, woman, age 21).

Finally, the visual aspect may have a certain power of attraction in the case of television and printed matter. The respondents may be sensitive to the presence of images and the quality of them, just as they may pay no attention to them, focusing instead on the content. Many are aware of the evocative power of an image that delivers information and its impact on the public (especially the front page of newspapers), above all when it is sensationalist. This treatment of images tends to put them off.

The respondents are sensitive to information format, but they are even more sensitive to information quality.

* * *

ROLE OF THE MEDIA

The respondents' representations of the current role of the media reflect the relationship of mistrust they have developed. They talked about the power of the media and their expectations of the role that the media should play.

Representations of the current role

The respondents' representations of the media are based primarily on their degree of trust in them. Their opinions of the role that the media currently play are based on this line of thought.

Certain respondents believe that the mission of providing information has been corrupted by money and that the media have become businesses that have to appeal to the majority of consumers. Young Montrealers in particular believe that the media are more concerned with selling a product, citing the concentration of print media and television in the Quebec market and corporate control over information. For the respondents in general, it seems to be difficult to determine whether the media are doing a good job, in other words providing information rather than spreading propaganda to promote their own interests, such as placing priority on entertaining news rather than subjects of interest to the community.

[Translation] It's a deliberate way of ensuring you'll have viewers and money in the days to come. Like reports that could have been presented in one day but are spread out over three days, in order to get ratings the second day and the third day. I sort of have the impression that the media are trying to make daily current events into a big soap opera, with good guys and bad guys. Ultimately, the news is really getting to be like that a lot. You watch the news as if you're watching a reality show. There are even surveys to show how many people are in agreement...⁴⁹ (MO 04-F, man, age 20).

The media are perceived as having immense power over the masses, power that belongs more to the owners than to the journalists. Concretely, they can decide what people will talk about, what people will take a position on, if only by bombarding them with information on a subject and by being sensitive to public opinion. A few of the respondents who are more savvy about communication strategies are aware that the media can structure collective thought and change its paradigm by the way

49. « Mais c'est une façon exprès de s'assurer du téléspectateur et l'argent des jours à venir. Comme un reportage qui aurait pu passer en une journée et qui sera étalé sur trois jours, dans le but d'avoir les cotes d'écoute le lendemain et le surlendemain. J'ai l'impression un peu que les médias essaient de faire de l'actualité quotidienne un gros téléroman, avec des bons et des méchants. Dans le fond, les nouvelles, ça s'en vient beaucoup comme ça. On suit les nouvelles comme un show de réalité. Il y a même des sondages pour voir combien sont d'accord... ».

they conceptualize the news. “The media creates social realities” (TO 04, man, age 24). But whether or not they are aware of this process of creating new paradigms, they raised this state of affairs by frequently citing the September 11 terrorist attacks and the fear that gripped North America. They also cited the war in Iraq and the Western interpretation of the conflict. It is therefore important for them to have varied sources of information so that they can obtain different analytical standpoints and form their own opinions.

Many of the respondents are concerned about the media’s power to influence people. They seem to accept the fact that the media have an educational role to play in making people aware of what happens in society, since they have the tools to do so. Some of them, who seem to be better informed and to be more aware of the workings of journalism, believe that the editorial writer’s job is to seek additional information and to do a more exhaustive reading of it, provided that this work is done well. The danger lies in the expression of personal opinions.

[Translation] During the last election, there was a radical change: [name of a journalist] comes along in [name of newspaper] and says: “I think you should vote Liberal because ...” Three articles, full of “because.” Right in the middle of the campaign. They went from making people aware to trying to channel opinion. And that’s not the role of the media⁵⁰ (MO 03-F, man, age 24).

Having already examined the role of the media in this report, we know that the respondents are divided when it comes to discussing whether the media have the right to express opinions and the resulting risk that they will influence public opinion. Some insist that it’s the media’s job to provide information not opinions. Others believe that it’s part of the role of the media to inform and influence opinions, in a context of freedom of the press, which is conducive to the expression of a wide range

50. «À la dernière élection, on a eu un changement radical: [nom d’un journaliste] est arrivé dans [nom du journal] et a dit: “Moi je pense que vous devriez voter Libéral parce que...”. Trois articles, sur les “parce que”. En plein milieu de campagne. On a changé dans ce côté-là, on est passés d’éveil d’une conscience à “canaliser” d’opinion. Et ça, c’est pas le rôle du média».

of opinions and must promote the conditions for such expression. Occasionally, there seems to be a line drawn between believing the media can have an influence by expressing opinions or, on the contrary, cannot influence people despite this expression of opinion.

The grey area seems to be the way opinions are presented: providing content that presents all aspects of a subject enables people to gain a deeper understanding and form an opinion of a subject, whereas a journalist's own assessment of the situation or that of a particular group becomes a tool serving personal or private interests. That is where the shoe pinches: doubts arise about content owing to the interests governing the information universe. This perception came up constantly in the discussions. Some respondents cope better than others with this reality, saying that the media can be one influence factor among many others and that the individual has freedom of choice. The ambiguity becomes more pronounced when they try to illustrate situations where the expression of opinion seems adequate or inadequate. Then the nature of the issue comes into consideration (political issue, social cause, etc.), and the dividing line isn't always clear.

If certain divergences persist regarding the way people are informed, the media are nevertheless regarded as having a social role that underlies an important responsibility to the community. The respondents believe that the practice of journalism involves wielding power, and that the media do this in several ways, consciously or unconsciously: they create social realities, help shape social norms, strengthen the status quo in relation to the interests of the dominant classes, influence people and so on.

I would have to say unfortunately that the media has a part in stereotyping a lot of people in society. I think they stereotype stereotypes, it's almost getting out of hand. I think that the responsibility of the media is that they have to acknowledge they have that presence, and that they have to inform people of that presence. I find, in my experiences I have met people who are very dependant on the media and have different views of life. I guess it's just really close-minded, open-minded and I think media is a tool that you can use to either way (VA 04, woman, age 20).

These comments on the power of the media once again indicate a relationship of mistrust extending to the entire group, to varying degrees of intensity. This mistrust does not result in rejection of the media, but rather in a critical attitude toward the information they convey. Is it the truth? Does the information provide a comprehensive view of issues and events? Does it present fact or opinion? Does it attempt to manipulate? It is difficult to say, however, whether the attitude of the younger respondents is more pronounced than that of the older ones. This appears to be true in a few cases, but no conclusions can be drawn.

Although the respondents accept the social role of the media, they do not seem concerned about its role in shaping Canadian identity. In fact, only one Anglophone living in Montreal made reference to the role that government television plays in this regard.

Expectations of the media

A number of respondents talked about the role that the media should play. Some even projected their ideals through their vision. Their expectations concern mainly the role of the media as the foremost social actors in the information universe in making people aware of social realities. This role should give rise to better news coverage (more objective content, comprehensive facts devoid of any ideological slant, a distinct division between fact and opinion), effective tools that promote searching thought (especially through various points of view) and content that also raises questions instead of always presenting definitive interpretations. Some believe that in this way information bias can be avoided, and people will be better informed, whereas others believe it is unrealistic to expect less biased content, since the media will always take a position on issues that are political, social, economic, etc.

This awareness role is closely related to a prevention role, in that if people are more informed about social, political and other issues, the more aware people will take themselves in hand and modify their behaviour, with respect to health, the environment, civic involvement, etc. But such an objective raises the question of the time allocated to information and the increasing role of entertainment in media coverage.

And, I think that we need to stop entertaining and move back to informing, because that's why people are turning to the Internet and turning to other sources, because they're not getting the information that they know is out there. They're tired of all the glory or whatever, right? So, I think that it needs to be more balancing to that (TO 04, woman, age 20).

The idea of making television an interactive information tool was raised by two respondents who see an opportunity to make the relationship between the medium and the viewer more dynamic, with more active involvement of the population in discussions. This vision reflects a need not to be force-fed information, but to be more active in the thought process through direct contact with media and information specialists, in order to ask questions or to seek clarification. In this way the media would in their opinion serve the population, in a context conducive to a social role not governed by private interests. The media would thus become a powerful tool of advancement. This extremely interesting vision of an information tool playing a social role seems idealistic to many respondents; they are aware that they must cope with a media universe constrained by many interests and they respond by using many sources.

The role of educating people, which was referred to in the preceding point, would seem to require better handling of the news, since not everyone is able to understand the importance of the events or issues covered by the media and to make the necessary connections. For instance, everyone grasped the importance of the events of September 11 and their impact on the world order, but that may not be the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some respondents feel that a large number of people do not always have a true idea of the impact of certain types of news and that it is up to the media to provide the necessary information to raise the level of understanding.

I guess the fine art of media coverage, of journalism, is to say: "what are we going to present to the public?" I think that's probably a constant question that's in every reporter, every editor's head: "what are we going to do today, and we have to say, why is this important?" And if they can show just

a little bit of why it is important to society, then you can say okay, they're doing a very good job (VA 01, man, age 20).

The respondents believe that the media have a role to play in the education and awareness of the population, and that they are therefore obliged to improve existing journalistic practices. At the same time, they are concerned about the context in which journalism takes place, since the media have immense power in shaping the meaning of social realities.

CHAPTER 4

Integration of information

This chapter discusses the way the respondents assimilate information and integrate it into their lifestyle habits and cultural practices. Integration of information is explored in terms of the impact that information may have on decision making and civic involvement. The objective is to determine whether information has an impact on the lives of the respondents. Individual competency and media expertise are also analyzed, for we believe they constitute two important elements of the integration process.

INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCY

Individual competency in integrating information is analyzed from two standpoints: general knowledge, which enables the respondents to understand current events and issues, and knowledge of the characteristics of the information media.

With respect to the respondents' general knowledge, we see that, given the complexity of social, political and economic issues, it is not always easy for them to understand the news and to grasp its importance from the information conveyed. This is especially true when an understanding of the news requires culture in the broad sense or historical or socio-political knowledge involving contexts that some respondents are not familiar with.

In such cases, they turn to people in their immediate social environment, people whom they consider qualified and who belong to the generation that witnessed the events. For those who attend an educational institution, this integration is facilitated by professors and courses that promote open-mindedness, provided that, according to one young woman, private interests, which have financial partnerships with certain institutions, have no indirect influence on the quality of instruction.

Many respondents seek out more complete information that enables them to analyze an event from several standpoints. Unlike others, they don't expect the media to provide them with all the information they need to gain an adequate understanding of events.

[Translation] Well, I don't know whether the media really have that role, that mission, of spoon-feeding you, so you'll understand everything. The media don't have the money to do that. Maybe the media shouldn't play [that role] and it's up to the individual to go and get [information]⁵¹ (MO 02-F, woman, age 24).

To ensure they have complete, reliable information and a sound analysis of the facts before forming their own opinions on the subjects that interest them, some go so far as to consult two or three articles by authors expressing different opinions or to compare information on several Web sites. In this way, they can identify sources with opposing points of view. Sometimes they go so far as to consult the medium where the news originates.

Like every couple days, I just run through whatever alternative media sites that I can. And then cross-reference them with major Associated Press [sites] and see what they're not telling, what they're not putting forward to put into the spotlight. And what they consider top headline stories, compared to major media (VA 01, man, age 21).

51. « Mais je ne sais pas si les médias ont vraiment ce rôle-là, cette mission-là, de te donner tout cuit dans le bec, pour que tu comprennes tout. Les médias n'ont pas l'argent pour faire cela. C'est peut-être que les médias n'ont pas à jouer [ce rôle] et c'est à l'individu à aller chercher [l'information] ».

But being able to give meaning to the news and properly understand it requires personal effort and dedication, since they are inundated with information each day from every direction. The respondents' integration of information is therefore selective, depending on their interests.

You know, I'll go through my paper and sort of pick out the articles I want to read. I don't read everything, you know. Those papers are thick, they've got a lot of information, and I have to pick and choose what I think is interesting (VA 02, man, age 23).

As for the characteristics of the media, a large number of the respondents are aware of the media's control over information and take a critical approach to media sources in general. Some even believe that not everyone is able to determine that a medium conveys a political ideology through its content and to identify the expression of that ideology. They believe that users often select media unconsciously on the basis of opinions that appeal to them, and that it's up to individuals to decide whether to accept information passively or to react with in-depth research and considerable reflection to develop their own point of view. Their belief in the media's power over information often, although not always, gives rise to active integration of information and a critical attitude: they check sources, they select their sources carefully and they are critical of content.

[Translation] You should try to get the most varied information possible on important subjects. You can get information from just about everywhere. Since there's always an opinion, you can't avoid it. [The sources] should represent different opinions, and you should use your critical sense to select the best of them and make the most enlightened decisions possible, according to our values⁵² (MO 05-F, woman, age 21).

52. « Chercher à avoir l'information la plus variée possible sur les sujets d'importance. Aller chercher de l'information qui vient un peu de n'importe où. Comme il y a toujours une opinion, on ne peut pas l'éviter. Qu'elles [les sources] viennent d'opinions différentes et utiliser son sens critique pour choisir ce qu'il y a de mieux là-dedans et de prendre des décisions les plus éclairées possible, et selon nos valeurs ».

Some are more critical, others less critical, while still others are indifferent. In one case, the effort to be informed is limited to conversations with people in the person's immediate circle of family and friends, which is therefore the main source of information. These various types of behaviour characterize the way the respondents integrate information.

* * *

MEDIA EXPERTISE

Generally speaking, the respondents agree that the media provide daily coverage that enables them to stay abreast of what is happening, but they disagree about whether this information provides a good understanding of the news. Some believe that the information enables them to get a good idea of the news and to follow events as they unfold, whereas others think it isn't always conducive to a proper understanding. They cite the example of television, which doesn't take the time to fully explain the news, giving each subject only two or three minutes within a structured newscast. Or newspapers that often provide partial coverage, a single analytical perspective or personal opinions that are not complete enough to permit a good understanding or objective enough to enable individuals to form their own opinions. Regarding themselves as capable of making a case and expressing their views, many feel the need to construct their own opinions and to avoid being influenced by the position of a particular journalist or medium.

Whether they live in Montreal or Vancouver, at one end of the country or the other, some respondents say the media do not always succeed in placing issues and events in context, which would enable them to achieve a good level of understanding. The complexity of the news probably raises their expectations regarding media whose role is to provide information.

[Translation] [...] I find that I read the news, I follow it, but where it comes from, why people are for it, why people are

against it, is never clearly presented. There's a lack of information⁵³ (MO 02-F, woman, age 23).

I'd say just a little bit more relevant context to their stories. It doesn't have to be like two pages of background, but some indication of the situation around whatever issue it is that they're telling you (VA 03, woman, age 23).

The existence of many media makes it more difficult to understand current events. What should you believe when a certain medium says one thing and another gives a different interpretation, when you don't have the knowledge to properly evaluate the information and its source? It's as if the wide range of media, especially access to information not under any absolute control, produced not a positive effect but the opposite: mistrust stemming from a diversity of interpretations.

So I think, traditionally, people have been brought up with a couple newspapers and a couple radio stations. The Internet's so new. So I think that's maybe where we're misinformed, we're getting different information sources, and nobody really knows what the real story is anymore. You can't really believe anything you hear (VA 02, woman, age 19).

In the section of the report dealing with the respondents' opinions about media coverage and information content, several of the points raised concern journalistic practice. Certain respondents cast doubt on the expertise of the media, citing the importance placed on sensational content and on ratings or circulation imperatives. Marketing imperatives are therefore regarded as obstacles that emphasize selling a product over providing quality content likely to give rise to a better understanding of current events.

* * *

53. « [...] je trouve que je vais aller lire la nouvelle, je vais suivre, mais ça part d'où, pourquoi il y a du monde pour, pourquoi il y a du monde contre, ce n'est jamais clairement présenté. Il manque de l'information ».

INFORMATION AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS

The idea that information has an impact on one's life is not always obvious for the respondents, particularly when they are asked point-blank to provide concrete examples in an interview context. Some had never considered this matter. Moreover, their answers may depend on how they interpret the question. With those considerations in mind, let's look at what the respondents' comments tell us.

Impact on decision making

The impact on the respondents of the information conveyed by the media can be evaluated more from their behaviours than from their ways of being (values and principles). Occasionally the media play a secondary role in the respondents' awareness of social realities, since their awareness comes about through other mechanisms. Certain respondents spoke of life experiences that accumulate over the years, giving them a store of knowledge and interests enabling them to discover other horizons and realities, as well as awareness that extends to the entire planet. These experiences may trigger greater interest in information, since it then begins to take on meaning.

I feel as though the group of friends that I have here as well as the ones that I have at home were equal, as far as their interest in contemporary issues and the news and stuff like that. The main difference would be why they're interested. Like, it seems lately, or at least for me, I'm more interested because I realize how it actually does affect me. Like, living in a bigger city, you see the ramifications more easily than living in a smaller city, and after travelling you realize what it actually means, for when you hear about something on the news... (TO 03, woman, age 20).

The impact that information conveyed by the media may have is varied, depending on the individual. Some say that such information in no way changes their way of thinking and does not shape their opinions. Others believe that the impact makes itself felt unconsciously, influencing individuals' thinking and decision making alike. Still others say it has a definite impact from

several points of view. For them, information seems to represent the key to changing mindsets and behaviours. Moreover, certain aspects of the role that the media play were raised.

One of the major positive impacts is to increase individuals' awareness by causing them to reflect, react or change their behaviour. Information provides people with a store of knowledge on the issues taking place in the world and opens their minds. It is conducive to thinking and new ways of looking at the world. It enables people to pass enlightened judgment and to make well-thought-out decisions, and thus to develop a critical sense. It can also help people form opinions by enabling them to better assess a situation, to avoid forming opinions on the basis of misinterpretation or prejudice, to base opinions on strong arguments or to strengthen opinions already formed. The influence of the media on mindsets may depend on several factors.

It depends on how opinionated you are. It depends on where you are in terms of age, in terms of progress. I don't want to generalize, but as you get older, you seem to seek less opposing points of view. You don't want to be insecure about re-questioning your values. It is a generalization, but it depends on how old you are, on how much you know already, how unaware you are (MO 07-E, man, age 24).

The other side of the coin appears to be the significant negative impact of media influence and the ability to manipulate people. The shaping of public opinion has already been emphasized. Here again, information may influence young people, but by telling them how to be and what to do or by shaping the way they look at other people, their environment or the world. For example, the media can reinforce stereotypes, impose standards such as ideals of beauty or contribute to the gentrification of urban areas by presenting a negative image of certain neighbourhoods. These examples were cited to show the unfavourable influence that information can have on everyday life.

Access to information makes it possible to construct a vision of the world, from everywhere in the world, through the eyes of journalists. But the vision of the world derived from media

content appears to be a dark one, since the focus is often on issues such as poverty, human exploitation, terrorism, ostracism affecting Arab peoples, social injustice, environmental problems and wars. Although this type of information raises awareness of global problems, it also leads to a feeling of impotence. To paraphrase one respondent, "ignorance is bliss," since occasionally life may feel like a burden in the face of so many tragic problems that are impossible to resolve. A feeling of powerlessness in the face of such problems and a profusion of bad news occasionally gives rise to diametrically opposed reactions: some look for the easy way out by placing limits on their information seeking, whereas others take action in accordance with their knowledge.

[Translation] I'm not sure that if I went and got more information I would necessarily be happier. It seems to me that every time I get more information, I'm less happy. Like, the world is such a damn mess. I would be so happy not to know that the world is a mess⁵⁴ (MO 02-F, man, age 24).

At the very least, changing their consumer behaviour sometimes gives the respondents the impression they have direct power over the course of events. In terms of concrete action, the respondents have changed their consumer behaviour in many ways. For reasons of social equity, one approach taken by many is to purchase fair-trade products or products manufactured by companies that have demonstrated their ethics and social responsibility. Being informed may also change behaviour related to health, nutrition and natural resources (water and electricity). In this respect, a number of respondents feel that the media do not make people sufficiently aware of these issues, which are more important for the community than the inconsequential news items that seem to attract the general public's attention – especially as, according to the respondents, the stories on the front page are often the ones that are discussed. Certain respondents referred specifically to the media's impact on the tone of social conversations.

54. «Je ne suis pas certain qu'aller chercher plus d'information, je serais nécessairement plus heureux. Il me semble qu'à chaque fois que je vais chercher plus d'information, je suis moins heureux. Regarde, maudit que ça va mal dans le monde. Je serais tellement content de ne pas savoir que ça va mal dans le monde».

Impact on civic involvement

We have just looked at young people's attitudes regarding consumer behaviour. In their opinion, the act of making a purchase has the symbolic value of civic involvement when it takes into account production conditions, including labour conditions, the physical context of the work and respect for the environment. This is a way for them to have a modicum of power over the dominant economic order, through actions taken individually.

Civic involvement therefore takes several forms, and young people may feel compelled to get involved socially in different ways. Responsible consumerism is one way. Another way is voting in elections – young people's voting rates constantly being the subject of statistical analyses. The respondents' comments clearly show that voting is the result of an individual thought process. Some respondents said that when they reached voting age, they realized they would have to make an enlightened choice. For others, major events, such as the September 11 terrorist attacks in United States, sparked an interest in political issues and the desire to exercise their right to vote. In such cases, awareness caused them to change their behaviour.

In other cases, being informed does not necessarily inspire them to exercise their right to vote. They say that they don't want to be involved in power-related issues or that they want to keep themselves apart from issues and decisions. But just because they don't vote doesn't mean they're not informed. They say their decision not to take part in elections is due to several reasons: a lack of interest in politics generally or in political issues and the parties in place; a lack of trust in the current political system; and a feeling of having no power over the choices made by politicians, unlike baby boomers, who they feel have more to say in decisions. This feeling of powerlessness seems more pronounced on the part of the younger respondents, and sometimes sparks a reaction from the older ones.

It is hard to be as attached to institutions, to talk fondly of things of which we are not part of. I mean, maybe because since we have not had time to influence the world, I mean generations around us have had time to influence the world,

but we feel like we haven't had time to influence the world (MO 06-E, woman, age 19).

[Translation] I think society sort of devalues information and our power of action. But in reality we do have power, more than we think. What they convey, I think it gives you younger people a pessimistic view of things. Like, you say: "Ha! We don't have any power!"⁵⁵ (MO 03-F, man, age 23).

The comments made by several respondents show that their social or political involvement in organizations affects their relationship to information. It leads them to believe they have a duty and responsibility to be well informed about subjects related to their area of commitment. It may even intensify their gathering of information from several sources regarding a larger number of issues, especially during election campaigns. Involvement accentuates their information seeking. Conversely, being informed may lead others to take part in demonstrations of solidarity or protest, or to get involved socially within their community or in national organizations, because it gives them a desire to act.

If you're more informed, if you know stuff that's going on, you're more likely to take action. If it's for a cause, you might want to do something about it, or to go out into your community and join a group or something like that. You might be more likely to do that if you know things that are going on (VA 03, woman, age 23).

Being informed seems to be central to civic involvement, which may take several forms. The respondents reminded us that, above all, we must not judge them on the basis of conventional indicators.

According to a young woman from Vancouver, we shouldn't underestimate the emergence of an anti-authoritarian youth subculture, be it social or political, in response to the dominant

55. «Je crois que la société véhicule une certaine forme de dévalorisation de l'information et de notre pouvoir d'action. Mais en fait on en a quand même, plus que l'on pense. Ce qui est véhiculé, je pense que cela fait que les jeunes, je pense que vous avez une vision pessimiste de cela. La manière dont vous parlez: "Ha! On n'a pas de pouvoir!"».

social order. This subculture appears to be a protest movement against the monopoly of major financial corporations and dominant conservative ideologies. In the media universe, this presence manifests itself through independent newspapers that attract young people looking for journalism devoid of corporatist interests.

Conclusion

Our research shows similarities and differences in the behaviours and attitudes of the respondents with respect to information, depending on whether they live in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver. We will summarize these elements and then compare several initial assumptions with the research observations and look for explanations for what we observed.

We saw many similarities in the behaviours and attitudes of the groups in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver with respect to practices, representations of the media and integration of information. The most important aspects are undoubtedly the versatility they demonstrate in using the media, their enthusiasm for the Internet, no-cost access that facilitates the use of information media and the critical sense they have developed regarding media and information. The respondents' critical sense may be due to the higher level of education that characterizes this age group.

The similarities observed are not synonymous with homogeneity, however, because the respondents demonstrate diversity in the frequency of their media use, the intensity of their practices and the meaning they give to these practices, elements that reflect their heterogeneous social profile, related in part to their level of education, field of study, interests and values. This diversity is also expressed through the respondents' choices of

media (traditional, alternative and electronic), the habits they have developed to obtain information, their definition of what it means to "be informed" and what constitutes good information content.

One of the notable similarities is mistrust of the media, a feeling that is widespread on the part of the respondents, who frequently spoke of bias and occasionally even "disinformation." This mistrust seems to be due to the presence of private interests and accentuated by concentrated media ownership. Moreover, it appears to be shared by 76 % of Canadians who believe the media are influenced by individuals or groups that exercise power in society and by 57 % who are concerned about concentration of ownership (Centre d'études sur les médias, 2004 : 72). The respondents' mistrust of media institutions is reminiscent of the cynicism of young adults regarding political institutions. In addition, it manifests itself as doubt regarding analytical content on the part of many respondents, who regard it as the expression of personal or partisan opinions and do not always seem to be able to separate objective from subjective. As Sauvageau (2003) points out, the forces on the current market are partial to a hybrid form of information combined with entertainment. This may lead to greater confusion between commented news and analytical news and may cause the respondents to become even more critical of any content that goes beyond straight reporting.

As for differences in behaviours and attitudes, the respondents in Toronto and Vancouver expressed greater dissatisfaction with Canadian and local media coverage. This may explain the fact that they are somewhat more likely to use Web sites created by interest groups or individuals. As for the Montreal respondents, they are distinguished by their mistrust of the stances taken by the Quebec media (sovereigntist or federalist) and their impact on media coverage. The wide scope of the research may perhaps have obscured other possible differences between the subgroups, especially as regards integration of information. It would have been interesting to explore further the impact that information may have on the lives of the respondents and their way of looking at the world.

As for the assumption stated at the outset that young people's interest in information is declining, our study shows that we cannot speak of a loss of interest on the part of the respondents. In point of fact, they want to know what is happening in Canada and elsewhere in the world and make sense of it, although to varying degrees. It seems that, in the context of socialization and sociability in which they live, they cannot avoid knowing about major current events at the very least. We could even go so far as to qualify this behaviour as "social rectitude," to cite the expression used by one respondent. This observation does not negate the fact that some young people are not motivated at all to follow current events. Although we were able to recruit very few young people of this type for the group interviews, at least one individual effectively represented young people who have little or no interest in information and, as a result of this characteristic, were difficult to recruit.

In addition, our research shows that a good number of respondents say they have average knowledge of information or are more informed than the average young people in their age group, and that they react negatively to the indicators often used to gauge their interest in public affairs, such as voting rates or newspaper readership. In the current context, characterized by an explosion of information and media sources and a high level of mistrust regarding governments, we must question the relevance of these indicators as evaluation measurements. Research has shown that today's young people manifest several types of interest in civic life and that their social commitment is directed toward causes that reflect their values (Gauthier et al., 2004; Gauthier, 2003).

The multiplicity of media necessarily gives rise to different user profiles. Having developed varied fields of interest that reflect their degree of education and openness to the world, young people naturally become adept at using several media, especially the Internet, to which they are very partial. Our study shows that many seek information on the Internet, using sites operated by the mainstream or alternative press, either in Canada or various places in the world. They often read the major newspapers on the Internet, which they praise for its flexibility, no-cost access (since they already use it in their activities) and unlimited number of sources. Although the print media are

concerned about the decrease in the readership of traditional newspapers and their number of subscribers, they are in fact contributing to this trend. Indeed, marketing strategies that encourage them to develop new products to cope with competition have led the print media to offer many articles in abbreviated electronic versions (such as Cyberpresse) on the Internet.

Access to the main daily news in abbreviated form appears to satisfy those readers who cannot or don't want to leaf through a newspaper that provides more information than they are looking for. Given the fast-paced life of today's youth (studies combined with jobs, for example), we can conclude that it suits many to stick to the essentials. And it takes only one action to obtain information, at no additional cost, thanks to the Internet, which is present in many Canadian households, as shown by certain indicators determined in this study. We cannot assume that if the electronic versions were withdrawn, the use of printed newspapers would increase, given that no-cost access is an important factor for this age group. It would be difficult to go back in time, since alternative media have also invaded cyberspace, and environmental concerns prompt some respondents to avoid printed matter whenever possible. But we can look at the situation from another point of view: if, on the one hand, the electronic version detracts from the printed version, on the other hand, it enables young people to familiarize themselves with subjects that may inspire them to deepen their knowledge by using printed matter, be it a newspaper, a magazine or a book. For some young people, the Internet is a source of information that leads to others.

As regards practices, the active lifestyle of this age group, at work and at play, is not always conducive to the development of set habits, such as regularly watching an information program or reading a daily newspaper. The availability for news depends on several factors specific to this period of life. The demands placed on this group include studying, working and studying at the same time, and integrating into the job market. The lack of time to develop regular habits is often accompanied by a lack of financial means to subscribe to newspapers or magazines. These characteristics, which may explain the behaviour of the 18-24 group regarding the media in general (Boily, 2000: 74-79),

may also explain the behaviour of the respondents covered by this study.

Moreover, closer examination of their schedules would probably have made it possible to determine the priority they place on socializing with peers and leisure activities, which reduce the amount of time they can devote to following current events in the media. Our research shows, however, that the regularity and intensity of their habits may be closely linked to the requirements placed on them by their studies, their jobs or their social involvement. It also points up the presence of social disparities in media access. Leaving home to continue their education may reduce the means that young people would otherwise have access to through their parents.

In line with the assumption that the respondents may obtain information from sources other than the media, our research tells us that integration of information often takes place through sociability and socialization, which indicates that the media are not the only information channel that the respondents deem valid. School, as a place of socialization, still plays an important role by awakening young people's interest in public affairs and by imparting knowledge and skills that help them understand the world. These information-integration contexts are already known, but they should not be underestimated because they increase curiosity and knowledge, as explicitly stated by several respondents. Moreover, school may even have to play an increased role in the lives of young people who will need greater knowledge and skills to grasp the complex realities that go along with the openness to the world promoted by the media. Having a good understanding of what is happening in the world appears to be an obstacle for a number of respondents, whether they live in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver. They speak of a lack of information and context, which also underlies a lack of historical knowledge. These citizens of the world – for that is what many young people now consider themselves – express the need to understand social realities beyond local borders, since they are open to the world and want to understand its complexity.

As for sociability, our research has brought to light this new method of integration, which has been little studied thus far. The interviews show that taking part in discussions with peers

and other people in their circle is one way the respondents deepen their knowledge, develop their opinions and ability to argue points, compare ideas and take advantage of the expertise of those who are better informed. Moreover, sociability represents an important source of motivation, since the ability to discuss current events with others is a leitmotiv for becoming informed and is becoming a context in which they identify sources of information that may interest them.

This study has made it possible to determine elements of understanding regarding people in the 18-24 age group and their relationship to information. A quantitative survey, however, would make it possible to draw general conclusions about the findings for this age group. We are thinking in particular of the importance of peers as a source of information, the varied representations of traditional and alternative media, the skepticism that may go so far as mistrust of the media and information, the extent to which no-cost access affects media use, and the varying degree of interest in being informed about what happens in Canada and elsewhere in the world. Moreover, a survey would perhaps encourage involvement by young people who have little interest in current events.

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APPENDIX 1

**Viewing of certain information programs during the 2002-2003 season – French-speaking population of Quebec –
September 2, 2002, to April 20, 2003**

Program	Network	Day	Start time	End time	Occurrence	AGE 18 +			AGE 18-24		
						Avg. aud. (000)	Rating %	Share %	Avg. aud. (000)	Rating %	Share %
Average of SRC programs requested											
... ce soir-1	SRC	MON-FRI	0.75	0.7708333	160	288	5.6	15.6	14	2.3	11.3
... ce soir-2	SRC	MON-FRI	0.7708333	0.7916667	130	218	4.2	10.7	14	2.3	10.8
Enjeux	SRC	THUR	0.875	0.9166667	28	528	10.3	22.3	30	4.9	19.4
Téléjournal 18h	SRC	SAT-SUN	0.75	0.7708333	64	370	7.2	20.4	12	1.9	8.9
Téléjournal, Le	SRC	SAT	0.9166667	0.9375	29	250	4.9	14.3	10	1.6	7.3
Téléjournal, Le	SRC	SUN	0.9166667	0.9375	26	288	5.6	14.5	8	1.3	5.2
Téléjournal-Point-1	SRC	MTWTF..	0.9166667	0.9375	161	332	6.5	18.6	12	2	10.6
Téléjournal-Point-2	SRC	MTWTF..	0.9375	0.9583333	149	204	4.9	15.2	7	1.2	7.3
Zone libre	SRCF..	0.875	0.9166667	30	420	8.2	18.9	20	3.4	16
Average of TVA programs requested											
Le 17 heures	TVA	MON-FRI	0.7083333	0.75	155	589	11.5	34.8	21	3.5	18.3
TVA 18 heures, Le	TVA	MON-FRI	0.75	0.7708333	165	568	11.1	35.1	15	2.5	13.1
TVA 18 heures, Le	TVA	SAT-SUN	0.75	0.7708333	66	604	11.8	33.4	26	4.2	20
TVA réseau, Le	TVA	MON-FRI	0.9166667	0.9375	163	588	11.5	33.1	25	4.1	21.6
TVA réseau, Le	TVA	SAT-SUN	0.96875	0.9895833	66	307	6	26.4	17	2.9	17.2
Average of TQS programs requested											
Grand Journal 1, Le	TQS	MON-FRI	0.7069444	0.7291667	160	438	8.5	29.4	25	4.1	21.9
Grand Journal 11h30, Le	TQS	MON-FRI	0.4791667	0.5416667	159	170	3.3	20.5	8	1.2	12.5
Grand Journal 17h30, Le	TQS	SAT-SUN	0.7291667	0.75	65	331	6.4	20.5	16	2.6	14
Grand Journal 2, Le	TQS	MON-FRI	0.7291667	0.75	165	357	11.2	33.2	31	5.1	26.6
Grand Journal 22h, Le	TQS	MON-FRI	0.9166667	0.9583333	256	184	3.6	11.7	15	2.5	13.8
Grand Journal 23h, Le	TQS	SAT-SUN	0.9916667	1.0125	66	159	3.1	16.9	14	2.3	16.7
Grand Journal 3, Le	TQS	MON-FRI	0.75	0.7708333	159	598	11.7	31.1	34	5.7	28.2
Lun-Dim, 19h-23h	LCN	MON-SUN	0.7916667	0.9583333		14.3	0.3	0.7	1.1	0.2	0.7
Lun-Dim, 19h-23h	RDI	MON-SUN	0.7916667	0.9583333		39.2	0.8	1.8	1.2	0.2	0.7

Source : BBM 2003 surveys

APPENDIX 2

Interview framework – The 18-24 Age Group and Information

Starting instructions (to be read to the participants)		
The Institut national de la recherche scientifique is conducting research on the 18-24 age group and its attitude toward information. Information is defined as any piece of information pertaining to social and political issues that allows people to understand events happening here and elsewhere in the world and issues concerning the community as a whole. Your participation will contribute to a better understanding of this topic. The focus groups will be held in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. The anonymity of the interviewees is guaranteed. Do you mind if I record the interview?		
Study dimensions	Interview framework	Instructions to the interviewers
Use of information		
1) Information seeking: social, political, economic, environmental, etc.; local, national and international. 2) Frequency of the practice. 3) Sources of information: traditional, electronic, alternative media or any other sources.	Opening question	
	For a young adult today, what does it mean "to be informed about what is happening here and elsewhere in the world"?	If necessary, give some concrete examples of knowledge pertaining to current events and issues, such as the war in Iraq, the federal election campaign, the Kyoto Protocol, the debate over same-sex marriage and healthcare privatization, the sponsorship scandal.
	Questions without any order of preference, depending on how the interview progresses	
	We often hear that people of your age are not informed or just a little bit informed. Do you agree with that?	If necessary, remind them of the small proportion of newspaper readers and young adults' preference for information presented concisely without any analytic content.
	Do you take the time to become informed about what is happening here and elsewhere in the world?	Try to discover the habits they have developed to obtain social and political information (economy, environment, etc.) from any sources of transmission. Is it a sporadic practice? When major events occur? During an election campaign? On a regular basis? Do they subscribe to newspapers or magazines? Look for constraints that prevent participants from becoming informed and going deeper into the issues at hand:
		a) Internal constraints: lack of interest, inability to understand the news well. b) External constraints: lack of time, difficulty in accessing the media they would like to use, lack of data to maintain their interest.

	On which subjects do you get informed?	Try to discover the issues that interest them (politics, environment, economy, education, health, employment, etc.). Try to determine whether they are more interested in local, national or international information and why.
	What means do you use to become informed about what is happening here and elsewhere in the world?	Try to discover the sources of information they use: a) traditional, electronic, alternative media (check whether they visit Web sites where young adults can exchange ideas); b) conversations with family members, peers, teachers, etc. (pay attention to any information transmitted through conversations and raise the subject if nobody mentions it). Try to discover their preferences and the reasons for their preferences.
Representations of information		
1) Knowledge of current events: the individual's perception. 2) Information content: interest in and evaluation of media coverage; interest in and evaluation of descriptive and analytic content; journalists' and media institutions' credibility.	Do you consider yourselves well informed?	Determine what their evaluation is based on (knowledge, habits, comparisons with people of their age, etc.). Determine any intention to become more informed on the part of those who perceive themselves as inadequately informed.
3) Information format: evaluation of tone, writing style, oral, written and visual format, length of articles and news bulletins, documentary format.	What do you think of the media coverage of current events here and elsewhere in the world or social issues that mobilize the attention of the population in general?	Do not influence the direction of the discussions, but raise the following aspects, if necessary: a) Media coverage: are events and social issues sufficiently covered? Are their concerns covered? b) Information content: Is the content of high quality? Do they trust the content (orientation and objectivity)? Do they trust journalists or sources of information (journalists' and media institutions' credibility)? c) News format and news medium: what do they think of the style (oral or written), the tone (neutral, cynical, partisan, etc.), the presentation (visual or printed), the esthetic form, the documentary format, the length of the articles and the news bulletins? Is this aspect important to them?

APPENDIX 2

Interview framework – The 18-24 Age Group and Information (suite)

Integration of information		
1) Understanding of the news: personal abilities, media expertise. 2) Integration of information through action: influence on the individual's life. 3) Role of the media.	Does the information transmitted by the media allow you to understand current events and issues happening on the local, national and international levels?	Get them to expand on the positive and negative elements and on their expectations. Try to determine whether they do anything to rectify their lack of understanding and by which means.
	Do you think that by becoming informed you make enlightened choices?	Try to discover whether being informed affects their lives (civic involvement, consumerism, respect for others, environmental concerns, etc.). Ask them to illustrate their answers with examples.
	Do the media play a role in your awareness of social realities?	Raise the matter of their representations of the media's social role: focus on the role the media currently play and the role they should play.
	<i>Closing question</i>	
	After all the discussion we've had on the topic of information, I am asking you again the question we started with: For a young adult today, what does it mean "to be informed about what is happening here and elsewhere in the world"?	The pre-test showed that the participants might have difficulties answering this general question at the beginning of the interview. This question has to be asked again at the very end to collect more information.

APPENDIX 3
Confidentiality letter
Research assistants
Research project
The 18-24 Age Group and Information

I undertake to assure the confidentiality of the information collected during the interviews conducted during the research project on the 18-24 age group and information. The names of the interviewees will not appear on the tape recordings, in the information forms completed by the interviewees at the time of the interview, in the research report or in any scientific publication using this information. Each interviewee will be identified by a false name on the typed transcripts, for analysis purposes only.

Name (please print)

Signature

Date

APPENDIX 4

Information letter

Research project The 18-24 Age Group and Information

Dear participant,

We are looking for young adults who would like to take part in a research project pertaining to the 18-24 age group and information. Here are some details on this project.

Research goal

The research focuses on the attitude of young adults to information. Information is defined as any piece of information pertaining to social and political issues that allows people to understand events happening here and elsewhere in the world as well as issues concerning the community as a whole.

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the attitude of young adults to information, focusing on three main aspects: information seeking (issues of interest, means used to become informed, habits, etc.); 2) representations of information (views of media coverage); 3) integration of information (understanding of the news, influence on civic life, role of the media).

Methodology

Focus groups consisting of five young adults will be held in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Your involvement in the project consists of taking part in a focus group that will be conducted by a member of the research team. The interview will be recorded. The approximate length of the focus group is two and a half hours.

Advantages and disadvantages

By taking part in this research, you will contribute to a better understanding of the attitudes of young adults to information. Very few studies have been done on this subject. The information collected will provide a better understanding of the 18-24 age group and information.

You have the option of not answering any question asked during the interview.

Confidentiality of the findings

In accordance with the procedure approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institut national de la recherche scientifique, the confidentiality of the results will be assured as follows. A false name will be used as a substitute name and will appear only in the typed transcript for analysis purposes. This false name will not appear on the tape recording, in the research report or in any scientific publication. Furthermore, no information that could potentially reveal your identity will appear in the research report or in subsequent analyses. The persons in charge of this research as well as the interviewers will sign a confidentiality undertaking.

Freedom to participate

You have the right not to answer to certain questions or to put an end to the interview, at any time, without prejudice.

If you agree to take part in the focus group, you will be asked to sign a consent form, in duplicate, the day the interview takes place. The purpose of this form is to ensure that the persons in charge of this project and the interviewers undertake to protect the rights of the interviewees. Before you sign this form, you can ask the interviewer for any further information you need pertaining to this research.

Recourse

If any problem or point of contention occurs, you can contact either of the following persons. Their addresses and phone numbers appear below.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Madeleine Gauthier
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APPENDIX 5

Consent form**Research project
The 18-24 Age Group and Information**

I am aware of the research project directed by Madeleine Gauthier and Claire Boily, of INRS Urbanisation, Culture et Société. The research pertains to the 18-24 age group and its attitude toward information.

I have been informed, orally and in writing, of the research goals and orientations, of the methodology used and of the details concerning my involvement in the project.

I have also been informed of:

- a) The ways in which the researchers will assure the confidentiality of the data collected and will preserve the participants' anonymity;
- b) My right not to answer any question or to put an end to the interview, if I wish.

I hereby agree to take part in this research project. I authorize the persons in charge of this research to use, for the research report and further scientific publications, the content of the interview, which will pertain to the topic of concern to them.

I have signed this duplicate form and kept one copy.

Name (please print)

Signature

City of residence

Date

APPENDIX 6
Research project
The 18-24 Age Group and Information

<i>Socio-demographic form</i>			
<i>(Check)</i>			
Sex	Female	_____	
	Male	_____	
Age	_____		
Main occupation	Student	_____	
	Worker	_____	
	Unemployed	_____	
	Other (specify)	_____	
Education completed	Primary	_____	
or degree/diploma pending	High school:	general	_____
		technical	_____
	College:	general	_____
		technical	_____
	Bachelor's	_____	
	Master's	_____	
	Doctorate	_____	
	Other (specify)	_____	
Language used during the interview	English	_____	
	French	_____	
City of residence	Montreal	_____	
	Toronto	_____	
	Vancouver	_____	
<i>For interviewer's use only</i>			
<i>(Check)</i>			
Interview code	Montreal	01 _____	02 _____
		04 _____	03 _____
	Toronto	05 _____	06 _____
		01 _____	02 _____
	Vancouver	03 _____	04 _____
		01 _____	02 _____
		03 _____	04 _____

APPENDIX 7
Sample of respondents – according to city of residence, sex, age, occupation and education

		Montreal Franco- phone	Montreal Anglo- phone	Montreal total	Toronto	Vancouver	Total	
Sex	Man	9	6	15	8	8	31	
	Woman	11	5	16	13	10	39	
Age	18-20	7	2	9	7	10	26	
	21-24	13	9	22	14	8	44	
Status	Student	8	6	14	12	10	36	
	Employed	10	4	14	5	5	24	
	Unemployed	2	1	3	4	3	10	
	Secondary	3	1	4	3	3	10	
Education	College	7	4	11	6	5	22	
	University	9	4	13	7	10	30	
		Master's	1	2	3	4	0	7
		Doctorate	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total sample		20	11	31	21	18	70	