INTERNET USE AND CANADIAN CULTURAL CHOICES

ABSTRACT

The desire to protect national identities often assumes a threat from either within or outside the boundaries of the national culture, however it is defined. Indeed, sometimes the threat from within is considered to be from "outsiders". The author analyzes a series of public opinion surveys on access and availability to arts and culture in Canada to provide insight into the impact of advance in technology on cultural consumption. Presumably, by rendering cultural boundaries more elastic, the internet is a threat to national culture. He questions whether global access to cultural expression via the internet is indeed diminishing such consumption as some fear. He contends that to date, there is no strong evidence to support this assertion. He concludes that underlying concerns are the evolving notions of national cultures.

JACK JEDWAB is Executive Director of the Association for Canadian Studies.

1. Introduction

Increased global access to information and cultural products via the internet has led some to fear that natural cultural expression is in jeopardy. In short, it is felt that enhanced global connectedness results in weaker national attachment as Canadian cultural products are increasingly in competition with the content in other countries that is available over the internet. If such connectedness does not result in diminished Canadian consumption, it may undercut support for mechanisms aimed at protecting Canadian culture, as "internauts" presumably favor fewer barriers. However, are we asking the right questions when it comes to framing the concerns of policy-makers and the private sector around the future of Canadian culture? After all, the internet can just as easily help expand interest in Canadian culture and in that regard make its multiple expressions more easily accessible. Moreover, it is unclear to what degree internet use acts alongside various demographic characteristics that traditionally influence cultural choices. Language background, age, income, education, ethnicity, region and gender need to be taken into account in an examination of the relationship between internet use and cultural choices.

To properly understand the impact of increased internet use on Canadian culture, we need to consider the following matters. First, the degree of internet use with cultural consumption requires some assessment of the initial knowledge and interest in Canadian culture. It is necessary to look at patterns of internet consumption to determine whether those most frequently listening to Canadian music also frequently consult websites for information on Canada and Canadians (few enquiries have explored the pattern of consumption in this horizontal manner). Yet another issue that merits investigation is the relationship between attitude and behavior when it comes to choosing things Canadian. In effect, are those who say that Canadian culture is important indeed the most avid consumers of Canadian products?

Is it fair to assume that the internet is an extension of established practices where interest in Canadian culture is reflected in reading, listening and viewing habits? There is also the question of the degree to which people are aware that a cultural product is indeed Canadian? In that which follows, we examine the attitudes and

behavior of those with computer access – the connected or digitally literate – and those without access – the unconnected or digitally illiterate. The focus is on music and film and the extent to which computer access has a possible bearing on opinion on Canadian content and the choices made by consumers. Some preliminary insight into these questions will be offered on the basis of an analysis of surveys commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage over the past five years on the access and availability to the arts in Canada.

Liss Jeffrey, director of the McLuhan Global Research Network, says the "World Wide Web is increasingly being integrated fully into the lives of most people in Canada." He adds that: "This is news to a lot of people who, I don't think, thought things were going to move this far this fast" (Canadian Press, August 26, 2006). A 2005 Statistics Canada survey found that 68 per cent of adult Canadians use the Internet for several purposes and over 15 million adult Canadians used the Internet at home in 2005. Almost two-thirds of them used it every day during a typical month. However, not everyone is online. Nearly ninety percent of those between the ages of 18 and 34 used the internet, compared with less than one in four over the age of 65. Income and education are also areas where the divide in internet use is especially pronounced. And some 58 per cent of residents living in Canada's small towns or rural areas accessed the internet in 2005, in contrast to some 77 per cent in many urban areas. The divide is attributable in part to the fact that cities have younger populations and more residents with higher income and education. But the gaps in internet use will inevitably decline.

II. The Net threat

Often the desire to protect national identities assumes a threat from either within or outside the boundaries of the national culture, however it is defined. Indeed sometimes the threat from within is considered to be from "outsiders". Presumably, by rendering cultural boundaries more elastic, the internet itself can be viewed as a threat to national culture. For several decades, cultural industries in several countries were concerned with the influx of American cultural products through, amongst other things, music and film. In terms of national culture identity and consumption habits, America was the "other" from which some degree of protection was essential if the domestic product was to remain viable. This view is widely held in smaller markets like Canada, where some worry about geographic and cultural proximity, making Canada less distinctive. That said, respected pollster and author Michael Adams has successfully demonstrated that there are important distinctions in the respective expressions of Canadian and American identities and values.

American culture, however widely it is consumed on an international scale, is still viewed as threatening. However, there appears an increasing tendency in many countries to describe the globalization as the principal threat to national identity and the requisite cultural expression. Some may regard the perceived threat to culture from Americanization and globalization as interrelated. A 2004 survey conduced in some 32 countries reveals that Canadians are less inclined than most other nations polled to agree that increased exposure to foreign cultures damages the national or local product.

As illustrated below, only one in five Canadians agree with the view that "increased exposure to foreign films, music, and books is damaging our national and local cultures", compared with forty percent of the global sample.

Increased exposure to foreign films, music, and books is damaging our national and local cultures

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
1. Russia	45.0%	27.8%	12.7%	9.7%	4.8%
2. Bulgaria	27.3%	32.3%	14.7%	14.3%	11.5%
3. Latvia	22.7%	32.0%	21.4%	21.6%	2.3%
8. France	19.4%	23.5%	19.5%	24.7%	12.9%
Total Universe	**13.8%**	**26.6%**	**19.3%**	**30.0%**	**10.3%**
18. Australia	7.9%	16.2%	21.7%	42.4%	11.9%
19. Great Britain	7.6%	19.2%	24.3%	38.6%	10.3%
22. Canada	**5.1%**	**14.5%**	**20.1%**	**48.0%**	**12.2%**
25. United States	3.7%	10.8%	21.8%	45.3%	18.4%

Source: International Social Survey Program, 2003.

Although they are much less protectionist than most as revealed below, 43% of the Canadian population surveyed agree that Canadian television should give preference to domestic films and programs. This is in contrast with half of the global sample who supports preferences being extended to domestic programs.

[Country's] television should give preference to [Country] films and programs

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
1. Russia	55.8%	20.4%	12.1%	8.7%	3.0%
2. Bulgaria	41.3%	31.3%	13.7%	8.4%	5.3%
3. Philippines	32.1%	39.8%	18.2%	7.8%	2.2%
Total Universe	**19.6%**	**30.8%**	**21.6%**	**20.4%**	**7.5%**
15. France	16.6%	23.4%	22.5%	19.7%	17.8%
21. Australia	14.7%	32.6%	28.2%	21.2%	3.3%
22. Canada	**13.1%**	**30.2%**	**24.3%**	**26.4%**	**6.0%**
26. Great Britain	11.4%	20.4%	32.1%	29.9%	6.2%
29. United States	8.8%	24.6%	29.5%	30.5%	6.6%

Source: International Social Survey Program, 2003.

Regarding the relationship between pride in cultural achievement and cultural preferences, as revealed below just over one in two Canadians that are proud of the country's arts and literature agree with giving such preferences to Canadian programs. This is in marked contrast to those who are not proud and are less disposed to support such preferences. Elsewhere in the world, the link between pride in cultural achievement and preference is also apparent. In the United States however, the link between the two is not as strong as a lesser percentage of those who are proud of that country's cultural achievements are favorable to cultural preference.

How proud: Country's achievements in the arts and literature

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
United States					
Very proud	11.8%	23.0%	26.0%	32.6%	6.7%
Somewhat proud	6.8%	25.5%	33.7%	27.8%	6.1%
Not very proud	2.8%	25.4%	25.4%	39.4%	7.0%
Not proud at all	10.0%	30.0%	30.0%	10.0%	20.0%
Canada					
Very proud	23.2%	28.1%	20.0%	24.6%	4.2%
Somewhat proud	10.2%	34.8%	24.8%	26.2%	4.0%
Not very proud	12.6%	20.4%	34.0%	22.3%	10.7%
Not proud at all	8.3%	8.3%	20.8%	16.7%	45.8%
Rest of World					
Very proud	28.1%	31.7%	17.3%	16.5%	6.4%
Somewhat proud	17.3%	32.8%	22.6%	20.6%	6.7%
Not very proud	15.0%	28.7%	24.2%	23.4%	8.8%
Not proud at all	19.5%	23.5%	20.6%	22.0%	14.4%

Source: International Social Survey Program, 2003.

III. Internet use and Canadian identity

It is widely held that the increase in the number of television channels has resulted in a decline in the degree of Canadian consumption by viewers. As the internet offers a much wider opportunity for global surfing, it is equally widely assumed that Canadian consumption will further decline in the individual's broader intake. However, the extent to which this entails a weakening of Canadian identity requires some causal demonstration of the relationship between cultural consumption patterns and attachment to Canada. Before further examining these issues, it is worth testing the underlying assumption that access to the internet may be undercutting Canadian identity. Surveys conducted to-date provides limited support for this idea as revealed in the table below. Based on the results of surveys commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage, the degree of internet use does not appear to have a significant impact on attachment to Canada. Indeed, it is the highest users of internet in the 16-21 age group that are most inclined to say they are proud to be Canadian. In the 22-30 age group, internet use appears to have no bearing on expressed pride in being Canadian.

On average, how many hours per week do you use the Internet?

	16-21	22-30
1-4 hours	84	84.8
Between 5 and 10 hours	86.5	85.3
More than 10 hours	92.0	85.7
Total	87.8	85.3

Source: Ekos Research, Rethinking Canada, 2004.

Access is important in the desire to consume cultural products. As observed below, persons with computer access are more likely to agree that they can find music by Canadian artists. About 18.4% of persons with no computer access estimate that they spend the majority of their time listening to Canadian music. This is slightly greater than the approximately 14.5% of persons with computer access that spend most of their listening time with music by Canadian artists. Those with computer access are only slightly more inclined to agree that the stories in Canadian movies relate to them with more than one quarter respectively expressing such views.

Nearly half of the respondents with computer access rate the quality of Canadian music as better than that of foreign artists. This compares with 44% of persons that do not have access to a computer. Those with computer access were just as likely to report that they have seen a Canadian feature film over the past year as those without computer access. Those with computer access are just as inclined – six in ten – to think that the acting, directing and production quality of Canadian movies is as good as movies made in

other countries. And two-thirds of Canadians agree that "recently the Canadian movie industry has begun to make better films" providing yet further evidence that the digital divide has not significantly influenced perceptions about the quality and competitiveness of Canadian films.

IV. Internet use and Canadian cultural choice

Our focus henceforth is not on Canadian identity per se, but rather on the degree to which internet use is either enhancing or diminishing Canadian cultural consumption. Consumption of Canadian culture is not always a function of strong Canadian identity. Listening to music by such popular contemporary Canadian artists as Avril Lavigne, Nelly Furtado or Nickelback isn't likely done to affirm Canadian patriotic sentiment. Hence any conclusions about Canadian identity need to be made with caution as there is a built in assumption that those persons that either consume more cultural products or indicate a stronger interest in them also possess stronger Canadian identity.

Of the nearly 500 respondents in the 2005 Decima Canadian Music and Film Survey that admit to downloading music for free from the internet, more than one third were between the ages of 15 and 20. Those above the age of 45 accounted for just over ten percent of downloaders. In examining the musical choices of three age cohorts, in the 15-20 group those who downloaded less than 50 songs (call them the "lighter" group) for free appear less inclined to have selected songs by Canadian artists than those who downloaded more than 50 songs (the "heavier" group). In the lighter group, nearly one third of the songs that they selected were not by Canadian artists and this is the case for just over 5% of the heavier downloaders. Hence the more downloading that occurs the more likely Canadian artists will be included in their choices.

The pattern appears to change with age as the lighter downloader in the 25-34 category are more likely to include Canadians artists amongst their choices than the 15-24 group. Some 13% of the lighter downloaders in the 25-34 categories did not include Canadian artists within their choices versus fewer than 10% amongst the heavier group.

Curiously, the downloading pattern in the 35-44 group as regards to the inclusion of Canadian artists resembles that of the 15-20 age cohort, with lighter users much less inclined to make them part of their selection than the heavier downloaders. Of those between the ages of 35 and 44 that downloaded less than 50 songs, some one-third report not including Canadian artists amongst their choices. All of the heavier downloaders in that category did include some Canadian artists amongst their choices.

How many of these songs were by Canadian artists?

How many songs did you download for free from the Internet last year?		None	1 to 9	10 to 50	51 or more
1 to 50	15-20	30.5%	48.2%	–	–
	25-34	12.9%	46.2%	40.4%	–
	35-44	33.9%	46.4%	14.2%	–
51 and over	15-20	4.3%	16.3%	52.1%	23.9%
	25-34	9.5%	23.8%	40.4%	11.9%
	35-44	–	24.0%	44.0%	24.0%

Source: Decima Research for the Department of Canadian Heritage, Canadian Music and Film Survey, 2005.

In the 15-20 age group, those who reported not downloading any songs from the internet were slightly more likely to have spent the majority of their time listening to music by Canadian artists (15.1%) than the moderate downloaders (12.1%) and the heaviest downloaders (6.8%).

What percentage of your total music listening is spent listening to music by Canadian artists. Age 15-20.

How many songs did you download from the internet last year	None	1 to 50	51 or more
Less than 10%	29.2%	28.0%	28.4%
10-50%	54.8%	59.7%	64.7%
51-100%	15.8%	12.1%	6.8%
Total number of respondents	82%	82%	88%

Source: Decima Research for the Department of Canadian Heritage, Canadian Music and Film Survey, 2005.

However, in the 25-34 age group, about three-quarters that did not download songs spent at least 10% of their time listening to music by Canadian artists. Amongst the light downloaders, nearly 88% spent at least 10% of their time listening to music by Canadian artists, which is more than the heavy downloaders whose listening habits resemble those of persons that did no downloading. As to the 35-44 group, some 84% of those not downloading spent at least 10% of their time listening to Canadian music, compared to 94% of the lighter users. It is the heaviest downloaders in this age group that report the lowest share of such consumption, with some three-quarters spending more than 10% of their listening time on Canadian artists.

V. Internet demographics and Canadian cultural consumption

At the outset we discussed the importance of various demographic characteristics that influence the consumption of Canadian culture. Earlier, a distinction was made between those with or without internet access to permit some preliminary observations about the degree of Canadian cultural consumption on that basis. But in order to understand the effect of internet access and its use on cultural consumption, other population characteristics need to be taken into account. Language background is a critical feature in the consumption of Canadian cultural products. Francophones have a higher rate of what is defined as Canadian cultural consumption (in large part because of language capacity and preference) and yet the strength of attachment to Canada does not logically follow the notion that such consumption leads to stronger Canadian identification. More than one-third (36.7%) of francophones surveyed agreed that the stories in Canadian movies relate to them, compared with just over one-fifth (22.7) of anglophones (rank 7-10 on the scale). Less than ten percent of anglophones say that they listen to a majority of their music in English compared with nearly one-quarter of francophones.

What percentage of your total music listening is spent listening to music by Canadian artists? – Access Internet at Home

Home Language	English	French
Less than 10% (and DK)	33.6%	21.4%
10-50%	57.6%	54.4%
51-100%	8.8%	24.2%
Total	910%	424%

Source: Decima Research for the Department of Canadian Heritage, Canadian Music and Film Survey, 2005.

VI. Quantity, quality, Canadian consumption and identity

Yet another issue that requires examination involves the relationship between the quantity of Canadian cultural consumption and internet use. In short, whatever their attachment to Canada, the sheer volume of people's cultural intake may result in higher overall consumption of Canadian products than for people with a higher identification with Canada. As noted, the volume of Canadian consumption amongst many Quebecers is often higher despite a proportionately lower attachment to Canada.

Nationally some 10.7% of people who disagree when asked whether the stories in Canadian movies relate to them listen to Canadian music a majority of their time. This compares with 21% of Canadians surveyed who agreed with that statement and consume Canadian music a majority of their listening time. On the other hand, 12.7 percent of those disagreeing that the stories in Canadian movies relate to them downloaded more than 50 songs by Canadian artists compared with 7% of persons agreeing with that statement that say they downloaded a similar quantity of Canadian songs. It is clear that the more one regards the quality of music by Canadian artists as superior the more likely that the respondent will consume music by Canadian artists as reflected below in the data on downloading music by Canadian artists.

How would you rate the quality of music by Canadian artists as compared to foreign artists?

Over the past year, how many songs did you download by Canadian artists?	None	1 to 9	10 to 50	51 to 100	More than 100
1 - Not as good	35,3%	52,9%	11,8%	–	–
2	100,0%	–	–	–	–
3	38,5%	46,2%	15,4%	–	–
4	8,3%	50,0%	33,3%	–	8,3%
5 - Equal	22,6%	31,3%	31,7%	5,3%	3,8%
6	13,9%	41,7%	33,3%	–	–
7	10,5%	34,2%	38,2%	10,5%	3,9%
8	15,6%	37,8%	31,1%	8,9%	4,4%
9	5,9%	29,4%	29,4%	23,5%	–
10 - Much better	10,1%	31,9%	33,3%	10,1%	10,1%
Total	18,4%	34,2%	31,6%	6,8%	4,2%

Source: Decima Research for the Department of Canadian Heritage, Canadian Music and Film Survey, 2005.

On issues of the consumption of Canadian cultural products across the spectrum, the data reveals for example that of those reporting that they had seen a Canadian feature film in the past year, some 23% said that the majority of the music they listened to was by Canadian artists, compared with 14% of those who said that they hadn't seen a Canadian feature film in the past year.

When it comes to patterns of consumption that may reflect attachment to Canada, again francophones are more likely to exhibit a greater degree of convergence in the "Canadianess" of the choices they make. For example, some 31.7% of the francophones who strongly agree that the stories in Canadian movies relate to them say that the majority of the music they listen to is by Canadian artists. This is compared with 15.1% of the country's anglophones surveyed that make the same claim. Assessing the relationship between their estimated Canadian listening and the volume

of songs they downloaded in a year by Canadian artists amongst anglophones, one finds that high consumers of Canadian music that engaged in downloading were most likely to include 51 or more tunes by Canadian artists in their consumption.

VII. Purchasing and downloading Canadian music

In this part of the study, we explore the relationship between consuming music through either purchase or downloading and the extent to which the choices made includes Canadian content. Less than 10% of survey respondents reported purchasing songs on the internet in the 12 months prior to the inquiry. Of those who did purchase songs on the internet, some 70% included some Canadian music in their choices.

With respect to free downloading of music, one-third of respondents consumed music that way. Canadian music was included in 80% of the downloading that was conducted. Only a small share of the heaviest downloaders included a large amount of Canadian music within their overall selection. As to the purchase of music CDs, some 88% of respondents did purchase a music CD in the previous twelve months. And within their purchases, some 86% did include Canadian artists. Again the largest volume purchasers did not engage in massive Canadian purchases.

Music purchase from the internet is clearly the least frequent form of music consumption and consuming in volume via this medium is less common than is the case for the free downloading and the purchase of CDs. CD purchase remains dominant and there is a slightly greater likelihood of including Canadian artists through this medium. Given the scale (songs versus CDs) the volume of Canadian material appears more likely to occur amongst downloaders.

Total	How many songs did you purchase from the Internet last year by Canadian artists?	How many songs did you download for free from the Internet last year by Canadian artists?	How many CDs did you purchase in the last year by Canadian artists?
None	29.2	18.4	14.1
1 to 9	42.0	34.2	74.1
10 to 50	23.7	31.6	9.4 nb
51 to 100	3.6	6.8	–
More than 100	–	4.2	–
Don't know/ refuse to answer	1.2	4.8	40
Total	164	500	1729

Nb Represents more than 30 in the case of CDs purchased.
Source: Decima Research for the Department of Canadian Heritage, Canadian Music and Film Survey, 2005.

On the basis of age when it comes to the purchase of music on the internet, the youngest cohort was more likely to do so than those over the age of 21. Indeed the gap was quite important in this regard, with nearly one-quarter in the 15-20 age group purchasing music over the net while the percentage dropped to just over one in ten for the 21-24 and 25-34 group respectively. As to the percentage of Canadian artists consumed on this basis, it was similar across the age spectrum with about three-quarters doing so in the 15-20 and 25-34 age groups respectively.

When it comes to downloading for free, some two-thirds of the group under 25 did report doing so, compared with approximately one-third of persons surveyed between 25 and 34 years of age. There were some gaps in the Canadian consumption across the age cohorts examined here with 83% of the 15-20 group including Canadian artists when downloading, 78% of the 21-24 group and 88% of the 25-34 group.

When it comes to the purchase of CDs by Canadian artists, again there is a pattern similar to the downloaders with the youngest cohort at 81% including Canadian choices, the 21-24 groups at 75% and the 25-34 at 90%. In each instance, over 90% of respondents did report purchasing CDs in the previous 12 months.

	What percentage did purchase from the Internet last year?	What percentage included some Canadian artists in purchases?	What percentage did download for free from the Internet last year?
15-20	24.0%	74.6%	68.4%
21-24	11.3%	92.9%	64.7%
25-34	15.2%	72.1%	34.1%
	What percentage included some Canadian artists in purchases?	**What percentage did purchase music CDs in the past year, either for your own use or for someone else?**	**What percentage included some Canadian artists in purchases?**
15-20	83.1%	33.6%	81.2%
21-24	78.5%	14.3%	75.6%
25-34	88.6%	36.0%	87.9%

Source: Decima Research for the Department of Canadian Heritage, Canadian Music and Film Survey, 2005.

VIII. Conclusion

There remains much research to be done in order to properly understand the relationship between advances in technology, the strength of Canadian identity and the consumption of Canadian culture. Indeed to begin with, there is a need to better understand the way in which access to ever changing technologies and increasing global connectedness influence Canadian identities and the expression and transmission of

Canadian culture. While some may choose to focus on the possible threat that internet access represents to Canadian identity and culture by stressing the idea that the more global choices available to people the more likely the Canadian cultural product risks being diluted in a medium where the opportunity for controls is very limited. To-date however there is little evidence to support the idea that the internet has had that affect on the Canadian population. On the other hand the internet can also be used to reach the population with more Canadian then ever in the very competitive environment that the internet represents. It also potentially permits unprecedented opportunities for the export of Canadian culture abroad. Underlying much of this debate is the way in which we define Canadian culture and whether increased global connectedness ands transnational ties will influence the definition of cultural expression. We also need to look at by whom Canadian culture is being defined and the role of the state in this regard. These are just a few of the issues that require consideration if we are to better understand the impact of changing technologies on Canadian culture and craft effective public policies to address fast evolving challenges.

Notes

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