



Ipsos Reid

CBCnews



The News Fairness and Balance Report

What Canadian News Consumers Think About Fairness and Balance in News

Final Report

Prepared for  CBC English Services

by  Ipsos Reid

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Executive Summary

Introduction

- Ipsos Reid was commissioned by the CBC English Services to design and execute survey research to provide the corporation with a comprehensive understanding of:
 - What Canadian news consumers (Anglophone) mean by “fair” and “balanced” news coverage, and
 - The degree to which Canadian news consumers (Anglophone) feel these principles are being delivered through CBC English News service delivery platforms (TV, Radio and web) and properties (CBC News main network, CBC News Network, CBC Radio One and CBC.ca), as well as through the competition (CTV News, CTV News Channel, Global News), and across content-types (local, national, international and business news).
- The Ipsos Reid research is one part of a larger CBC study on the issues of fairness and balance in the news. The other part, conducted by Erin Research, involves an extensive content analysis of sampled news coverage across platforms and news types over a 25-week period (beginning October 26, 2009 and ending May 2, 2010). The results for that part of the broader study are reported under separate cover.

Method

- Interviewing was conducted online via the Ipsos iSay pre-recruited online panel over a six week period from April 6th to May 17th, 2010.
- An important consideration for this research was to collect data relevant to understanding certain ethno-cultural (visible minority, Aboriginal Peoples), socio-economic, geographic and demographic subgroups. Therefore sampling for this research was designed among three separate population groups, resulting in the following:



- Core Sample: n=2555 representative Anglo Canada,
- Aboriginal Peoples Oversample: n=206 oversample of self-identified Aboriginal/First Nations (including Native, Metis, Inuit, etc.),
- Visible Minority Oversample: n =646 self-identified, representative to primary visible minority communities residing in Anglo Canada.

- In order to qualify for the survey, respondents must have reported that they have watched/listened/accessed/read news or current affairs/information or programming at least once a month through at least one platform – TV, radio, online, newspaper, or wireless/mobile device.

- The questionnaire was reviewed by Erin Research and the Balance and Fairness Expert Panel (see separate report by Erin Research).

- Any reference to “Canadians” in the reporting implies adult residents in English speaking Canada. No French interviewing was conducted.

- There are two further key elements in the design of the survey that are relevant to the interpretation of the results:
 - First, respondents were never presented with any formal definition of what fairness and balance means. Rather, before asking respondents to evaluate any organizations or types of news, they were asked to define what balance and fairness meant to them. Further probing on the issues, for example rating how various organizations performed on fairness and balance, was tailored as much as possible to the individual definitions that respondents themselves had provided.
 - Second, when asked to evaluate news organizations or types of news, the questions were tailored to adhere to respondents’ own perceptions of whether they thought fairness and balance were the same thing or thought that fairness and balance were different. Consequently, respondents who said that they perceived

fairness and balance to be the same thing were asked to evaluate X, Y, Z in the context of fairness and balance combined. Respondents who said that they perceived fairness and balance to be different things were asked to evaluate X, Y, Z separately in the context of fairness and in the context of balance. For this reporting, these various contexts were rolled-up into an overall measure of fairness and balance.

- This report presents descriptive information about opinions regarding news content and provides context for assessing fairness and balance. However, the final determination as to whether the results are “good” or “bad” lies with the reader.

Select Key Observations

- Canadian news consumers are regularly accessing different platforms and news organizations for their news. For example, almost four-in-ten news consumers say that they are using three or more platforms daily for news (from among TV, radio, online, newspapers, mobile).
- Canadian news consumers are not convinced that news organizations can be completely fair and balanced. While two-thirds of news consumers do agree that they can, only about one-quarter is convinced of this (“strongly agree”).
- Fairness and balance in news are not the same thing to many Canadians. Two-thirds of Canadian news consumers say that they perceive the two to be different:
 - The concepts of accuracy, unbiased, truthful, factual, honesty, multiple points of view and impartiality have the highest association (aided) with the concept of fairness, while
 - Multiple points of view, range of subjects and opinions and regional representation emerge with the highest association with the concept of balance.



- The differences make intuitive sense and in the minds of news consumers relate back to the basic equation that balance equals what a news organization covers and fairness equals how it covers it.
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- There is little differentiation across the main Canadian news organizations in terms of their performance delivering against fairness and balance overall, and by platform and by types of news specifically.
- News consumers give consistently positive ratings to the news organizations they use, platforms they access and types of news they consume in terms of performance delivering against fairness and balance. While there are some relative differences in ratings, positive scores (good/very good/excellent) tend to come in around the 75%-80% level or higher in the contexts examined.
- It is noteworthy that throughout the survey results, the awareness, attitudes and opinions of Canadians on fairness and balance are not differentiated in any absolute sense based on demographic characteristics, region or even among the special subgroups of Visible Minority and Aboriginal Peoples news consumers:
 - Granted there are relative differences in opinions on some of the measures. For example, younger news consumers tend to be more cynical than average about news media overall (e.g., less likely to believe media can be fair or balanced, less likely to believe that journalism is critical in society). Aboriginal Peoples respondents rate “reflecting First Nations people appropriately” higher than average in terms of the factors they perceive as contributing to journalistic integrity.



- Nevertheless, for the most part news consumers from all walks of life and segments of society tend to share generally common perceptions and assessments of issues related to fairness and balance in the news they consume. In other words, they are more common based on the fact that they are news consumers than different based on their socio-demographic, ethno-cultural or regional characteristics.

- A key consideration in assessing any implications from the data is recognizing the historically consistent tendency of Canadians to often report somewhat more cynical opinions on certain things at one level, but also report generally positive personal experiences on those same things at another. In healthcare, for example, Canadians have consistently reported many concerns about the quality of the healthcare system, but then report generally positive personal experiences when they have used the healthcare system.

- This tendency may also be at work in Canadian news consumers' assessments of fairness and balance in the news. A significant majority of news consumers rate their experiences on fairness and balance in the news they consume in a generally positive light, even though some of their general attitudes toward fairness and balance in the media might suggest otherwise.