

# Canadians won't pay for news online: Study

## Majority would quit reading their fave online news source if they had to pay

By JUSTINA WHEALE  
Epoch Times Staff

Why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free? That's a sentiment shared by the majority of Canadians who say they would not pay to read news online, a recent study found.

The study, conducted by the University of British Columbia, reports that 81 percent of 1,682 Canadians surveyed would not pay to read news online. Ninety two percent actually said they would stop reading their favourite online news source if it introduced a paid model.

Surprisingly, there was little difference of opinion between age groups and education levels or between rural and urban populations.

"These results should give pause to any news corporations in Canada or abroad that are considering erecting paywalls around their content," says Donna Logan, a professor emerita of UBC's Graduate School of Journalism.

Logan is lead author of Canadian Consumers Unwilling to Pay for News Online, the first study in a research series for the Canadian Media Research Consortium (CMRC).

"Online news consumers, long used to getting their news free when production costs were mostly subsidized by print and broadcast advertising, are balking at the idea of having to pay for content now that revenues are falling below the level needed to sustain media operations across various platforms," says Logan.

This may be troubling news for The New York Times, which launched an experimental online "paywall" in Canada in late March. In this model, readers can access a maximum of 20 articles a month before being asked to pay for a subscription, about \$15 per month.

When The New York Times introduced the paywall system on March 28, total page views on their website declined by 11-30 percent and overall visits decreased by up to 15 percent in the first 12 days, reported Experian Hitwise, an online research firm.

Compared to recent international studies, the findings suggest Canadians have a slightly greater opposition to paywalls than people in the U.S. and U.K. But about 30 percent begrudgingly said they would be willing to pay for news if they "had to."

Canadians surveyed also said

that charges would be most acceptable for breaking news (28 percent) or hard news (22 percent).

In a second report, CMRC finds that Canadians value their home internet connection "more than any other medium." Forty two percent say their home internet connection would be the "last media device they would be willing to give up," while 30 percent say the computer is their medium of choice for consuming news.

But the study notes that Canadians are doing a lot more than reading news online—they are also checking e-mail, home banking, gaming, and downloading TV shows and movies.

Young people have a significant online bias, the study finds. Fifty-three percent of respondents aged 18 to 34 list home Internet as their first choice compared to 43 percent aged 35 to 54 and 32 percent aged 55 and older.

For newspapers however, the relationship is inverse: 15 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds, 22 percent of 35- to 54-year-olds, and 33 percent over 55 prefer accessing news and information through a printed newspaper. Preference for television was also shown to increase with age, and overall 38 percent say they still prefer watching news on TV.

Ultimately, the study concludes, "a preference for online media is clearly developing among



When the New York Times started to charge for online news content, overall website visits decreased by up to 15 percent. A new study says 81 percent of Canadians would not pay to read news online. MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES

Canadians."

But as media moguls scramble to find sustainable models for a future in the industry, they are also increasingly looking for advertisers to fill revenue gaps. This dependency creates a delicate balance between advertiser interest and public interest.

As Logan points out, before being too quick to refuse to pay for quality content, it is important to consider the consequences of heavily advertising-driven content. As more advertisers look to market on the web, the more they become

interested in consumer spending habits.

"Many members of the public are only beginning to become aware that when they search, buy or surf online, they are leaving a trail that provides useful information which can be aggregated, sold, and used by merchants as a means of targeting people," she warned.

"If and when the public becomes more aware of the issue and decides they really don't want it to continue, it may be too late. The practice is already widespread so the genie is out of the bottle."

# Mega quarry to gulp 600 million litres of water a day

## Proposed open pit operation 'headed for environmental disaster,' says farmer

QUARRY CONTINUED FROM A1

Opponents say the massive 2,316-acre open pit mega quarry proposed for Melancthon by The Highland Companies would destroy thousands of acres of much-needed productive farmland and divert water from rivers and wells.

Below the land lies an aquifer that forms the headwaters of five major river systems in southern Ontario that are important drinking water sources for more than a million people downstream.

The plan by Highland, a privately owned company backed by a Boston-based multi-billion dollar hedge fund, would require blasting 200 feet (60 metres) beneath the water table and the extraction of approximately 600 million litres of water per day.

The company submitted its application—all 3,100 pages of it—to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources last month. The 45-day public comments period ends April 26, which is not nearly enough time as far as local farmer Carl Cosack is concerned.

Cosack, vice chair of the North Dufferin Agricultural Community Taskforce which is fighting the project, says he has asked Minister of Natural Resources Linda Jeffrey for more time to research Highland's application.

"We strongly feel that this application is the biggest in the province ever and that it cannot be treated like the rezoning for rural residents—and it is being treated that way. As a matter of fact, a resident in this neighbourhood would need an environmental assessment before you could build on your quarter acre or acre lot, yet a mega-quarry of almost 2,400 acres does not require an environmental assessment. How strange is that?"

Highland, which owns two large farming operations in Dufferin County, bought up 7,000 acres, mostly devoted to growing potatoes, from local farmers over the last four years.

"Nobody ever thought that this huge amount of land would be bought by anybody, much less a U.S. company, and we have 45 days to try and understand what they're trying to do," says Cosack.

The application is asking to put 3,600 40-ton loaded trucks on the road every day except statutory holidays and the same number of empty ones coming back—150 entries and 150 exits per hour. Blasting would take place between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. each day.

Cosack notes that the application

only covers best-case scenarios, with no mitigation plans if anything goes wrong.

"Water is unpredictable, and when you dig 200 feet below the water table there isn't an expert in the world who could predict without chance of error that all will go as planned," he says, adding that the quarry is "a development headed for environmental disaster."

SITE 'CAREFULLY SELECTED'

If it goes ahead the quarry will be about one-third the size of Toronto, making it the second largest such operation in North America.

Highland says Melancthon is an ideal site for the quarry because it is sparsely populated and has direct access to a former provincial highway designed and designated for truck traffic.

The company says Melancthon was "carefully selected" so that the quarry, which will create 465 jobs, could be conducted in an environmentally responsible manner, noting the area lies outside of the Niagara Escarpment, a UNESCO Biosphere reserve which borders the edge of the proposed quarry site.

"Unfortunately one extracts aggregate where it happens to be located," says Highland spokesman Michael Daniher.

"What we did as part of a research process is try and identify a site that would have the fewest consequences and the fewest constraints in terms of legislation governing such activity."

Daniher points out that an open house and a public information session have been held to keep the community informed, and company representatives have attended 130 meetings of councils committees and community organizations.

"We're certainly aware of concerns that people have expressed. We are trying to address those concerns and we believe that the process that is now under way will assist in doing that as we move forward."

Highland's plan to reinject the 600 million litres of water collected daily on the open pit mine floor back into the wells around the quarry worries critics, who say the water by then will be heavily contaminated.

Daniher notes that reports in the application conclude that the project's design and water management plan ensures that water beyond the quarry's property line would not be affected, nor will there be any adverse affect on existing or future sources of ground water.

"The company has stated that it

wouldn't do anything to jeopardize the water that it relies on like every other farming operation in the community, and that's why it was studied for years," he says.

He denies allegations that Highland also intends to mine its own landholdings if the project gets the green light.

FOOD OR GRAVEL?

The application says the land will be restored in stages during the life of the quarry to prime agricultural quality and become part of Highland's farming operations.

While this sounds good, in reality it's not likely to work, says Dale Rutledge, whose 2,000-acre farm is just one farm away from the proposed quarry site.

"To rehabilitate it 200 feet down with the soil that they piled up as a berm for years—it's just ludicrous. It will be on a shale base when they take the limestone out and it's just not possible."

Rutledge, whose farm has been in the family since 1883, says he's also worried about the copious amount of dust the quarry would generate.

"The lime-dust could change the pH in our soils to the point that we would have to completely reinvent how to farm with the pH being very alkaline. The dust off this thing will be no good."

The local landscape has already changed drastically since Highland began clear-cutting trees and burning down farmsteads, some over a century old, in preparation for the quarry, says Rutledge.

"The community looks like a prairie. They just came in and made it look like [the trees and buildings] were never there."

To raise awareness about the project, opponents are organizing a five-day "walk to stop the mega quarry," starting at Queen's Park in Toronto on April 22 and ending in Melancthon on April 26.

And in a bid to protect that special Honeywood soil, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture has asked the Township of Melancthon to classify the region under "Specialty Crops Area"—a designation that would afford the land the highest priority of being protected for ongoing crop production.

OFA holds that no level of rehabilitation could make the Honeywood soil fit for potato production once quarrying operations end.

In a commentary, OFA president Bette Jean Crews wrote that the soil is "essential" and urged the provincial government to take action to "protect the integrity of the Honeywood soils."

"The decision must be made between the value of food and the value of gravel and sand," she wrote.

# Disinterested voters a trial for democracy

VOTERS CONTINUED FROM A1

That was certainly true for Conservative Rahim Jaffer, who lost his Edmonton riding to Linda Duncan of the NDP by 463 votes in 2008. Now Duncan holds the one orange splotch on an otherwise Tory blue province.

Conacher says if you don't like any party, cast a spoiled ballot. It's a civic duty to let politicians know they are getting it wrong and if you do cast a spoiled ballot, they know there is a voter they could have had.

"If you are not voting, you are not really relevant to them."

MPS DISAPPOINTED

Samara, a relatively new organization named for the tiny helicopter seeds that fall from elms and maple trees, is also scrutinizing Canada's democracy.

The group has published three reports based on interviews from 65 MPs who were leaving office. The latest came out Monday and is making waves for uncovering how disappointed MPs are with the system.

MPs told Samara's interviewers that they were embarrassed by the public displays of politics in the House of Commons, saying that little good comes from question period and other high-profile events. "The reason they are concerned is they know that presents a really negative and disengaging face to Canadians," says Samara co-founder Alison Loat.

While most people behave in public and act poorly when others aren't watching, "politicians seem to be different," adds Loat.

MPs said they did their best work in relatively ignored committees and behind-closed-doors caucus meetings.

But they didn't just blame the system, they blamed themselves, most specifically their parties. They said they often didn't understand legislation they were told how to vote on, and were disappointed with the opaque nature of leadership decisions that ran counter to their own hopes to do democracy better, the reason many ran for office.

But despite all that, Canadians need to stay upbeat about their democracy, warns Loat. "People like to be drawn to a story that is a bit hopeful," she says.

If people think Parliament is broken, they are more likely to disengage, and what Canada most needs is an active citizenry to rejuvenate its democracy.

"I think we do have a really good democracy on the whole, when you measure ourselves in international comparisons," she says.

Unfortunately, nobody ever writes a news story about how many people didn't get into a car accident, goes an old newsroom adage. Instead, what we most hear about are the disagreements, scandals, and unresolved

legislative hurdles.

"Some of that is very good, because of course you don't want to get complacent about the fact we live in a great democracy ... but the risk is we don't focus on emphasizing what is working well, what we want to preserve," says Loat.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

While the system does work in that it generally responds to what the citizenry wants, that core function of democracy is often lost in the sweeping criticism levelled at politicians. "That is the truth about democracy—it requires citizen participation to renew itself," she says.

If the actions of politicians are leading people to disengage, that needs to be understood and illuminated.

"It is all of our jobs to make it better and keep it on the path it is on. It might sound idealistic, but I really do think we are lucky to have what we have."

University of British Columbia political science professor Richard Johnston, an award-winning academic and author, has done some of the most in-depth election analysis in Canada. Currently the Canada Research Chair in Public Opinion, Elections, and Representation, Johnston says it is hard to fix the turnout problem, because it isn't clearly understood.

"The truth of the matter is we still don't have a very good understanding of the drops in turnout."

He agrees with Conacher that safe ridings are partly to blame, but says that since 1994, many ridings have become more competitive but without a subsequent rise in turnout.

While he agrees with the popular refrain that cynicism is keeping voters away, he doesn't think it is because of negative campaign messaging, a popular theory. Campaigns are no more negative now than they ever have been, he says.

"It is a bit of myth that they have become more negative."

But like Conacher and Loat, he's concerned.

"I think we should be worried about it. Democracy is a precious thing and it is not good when millions of people abandon the quest."

Our 75 percent turnout may not have been as high as in Europe, but now we are lower than U.S. Presidential elections.

"It can't be a sign of civic health, there has to be a problem. I just wish I could put my finger on it."

He also agrees that mudslinging in Parliament is turning people off. "The tone of Parliament is more negative than it needs to be. Among Parliaments of the world it is a strikingly negative and contentless place."

He says one only need watch question period in the United Kingdom to see how much better things could be done.

## EVENTS

ECO EXPO

Up to 100 local organizations and businesses will be showcasing their products and services related to going green, eating local and being healthy. They will offer local food tastings, massage treatments, product discounts, demonstrations and more.

Saturday, April 23, 2011

10:00 am - 4:00 pm

RA Centre

2451 Riverside Drive

(between Bank & Bronson)

Admission is by Donation

SEARS STARS ON ICE PRESENTED BY SAMSUNG

Canada's premier figure skating tour has brought together a superstar ensemble of Olympic, World and National Champions from all over the globe for its 21st season. This year's cast promises to deliver fans of all ages the ultimate live figure skating experience with a gathering of legends past, present, and future.

Saturday April 23, 2011, 7:30 pm

Ottawa Civic Centre

1015 Bank St

www.starsonice.ca

ANNUAL ORCHID SHOW AND PLANT SALE

Saturday April 23 - 24, 2011

12:00 pm - 5:00 pm,

Sunday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Nepean Sportsplex

1701 Woodroffe Avenue

\$10 general \$8 seniors,

children under 8 free

http://ottawaorchidshowociety.com

BEATLES BAROQUE: LES BOREADES DE MONTREAL

The musicians of Les Boréades de Montréal pay a sincere and enthusiastic tribute to the Beatles through their instruments which also date back to another era!

Friday, April 29, 2011, 8:00 pm

Harold Shenkman Hall

245 Centrum Boulevard

Tickets: \$39

OF EARTH AND SKY  
Prairie Artists in the Firestone  
Collection of Canadian Art

With a particular focus on the work of Winnipeg artist L.L. FitzGerald, this exhibition highlights his and four other artists' observations of the surrounding landscape and in many cases, an increasing interest in abstraction as a result of spiritual contemplation.

April 2 to May 29, 2011

Opening: Tuesday 26 April at 6:30 pm

Presentation on the history of the landscape genre in the prairies:

Friday April 29 at 3:30 pm

Join the Curator for a tour of the exhibition Of Earth and Sky:

Friday May 6 at 12:30 pm

Firestone Gallery

Arts Court 2 Daly Avenue

Pay by donation

SHAPING CANADA'S CLEAN TECHNOLOGY FUTURE TOGETHER

Seize this opportunity to discuss, forecast and shape Canada's clean technology industry as leading entrepreneurs, executives, investors, international trade representatives, corporate partners, and policy makers gather to align and share resources, information and expertise.

Tuesday, April 26 - Registration and

Welcome Reception, 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

Wednesday, April 27 - 8:30 am to 9:00 pm

Thursday, April 28 - 8:30 am - 3:30 pm

Ottawa Convention Centre

55 Colonel By Drive

canadiancleantechsummit.com

LINDSAY BRYDEN IN RECITAL

Ottawa-born flutist Lindsay Bryden presents an exciting program of flute and piccolo repertoire with sought-after collaborative pianist Philip Chiu, who joins her from Montreal.

Monday, April 25th, 2011,

2:00 pm - 3:30 pm

St. Andrew's Church

82 Kent Street

Free concert

MINI MEDICAL SCHOOL

The Faculty of Medicine is proud to offer a unique 6-week series of innovative and informative lectures on frequent conditions Family Doctors commonly investigate and treat in their practices.

Thursday April 24, 2011, 7:00 pm

The Ottawa Hospital, Civic Campus

1053 Carling Ave

\$175 adult, \$130 senior/student

613-761-4480 x 2

THE OTTAWA GUILD OF POTTERS  
SPRING EXHIBITION & SALE

Over 50 talented regional potters and ceramic artists show high quality ceramic creations - beautiful housewares, jewellery, and decorative home and garden accessories. Some demonstrate wheel-throwing and hand-building.

Thursday, April 28, 2011,

6:00 pm - 10:00 pm

Shenkman Arts Centre

245 Centrum Blvd.

Free

HOW TO FINANCE A  
SMALL BUSINESS

In this seminar, Small Business Managers from RBC Royal Bank will discuss the many options, methods and programs the financial institutions have to offer individuals who are looking to finance their small-medium sized business.

Wednesday April 27, 2011,

12:00 pm - 1:00 pm

City Hall, 110 Laurier Ave. W., Ground Floor

To reserve: (613) 560-6081

Free

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OF THE WORLD