

**Ageing, Communication, Technologies (ACT Project), Concordia University**

**Intervention on**
***The Future of Audio and Video Programming in Canada: What Will Come Next? Phase I***

CRTC Notice 2017-359

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**1.0** Executive Summary

**2.0** Introduction

**3.0** Key Preliminary Findings

**4.0** Future Steps

**5.0** Preliminary Recommendations

**6.0** Bibliography

**7.0** Appendix A: Aging, Communication and Technologies’ Longitudinal Study on Older Media Audiences

**1.0 Executive Summary**

**Our key preliminary findings in this first phase of intervention, as outlined in detail below, are as follows:**

1. Older adults (65+) tend to rely on television sets and radios to access information and entertainment rather than computers, tablets, or smart phones
2. Older adults are not a homogeneous group. There is an emerging difference between the media practices, related to digital distribution of the *younger old* (60-64) and those who are older.
3. There are differences in the media consumptions of older adults correlating to income and education. Older adults in higher socioeconomic brackets with higher education are more likely to use online platforms for watching television and listening to radio.
4. Recent shifts in distribution models have impacted the ways older adults watch television
5. Older adults prefer scheduled and consistent programming over on-demand options
6. Older adults stress that access to information is a key part of citizenship
7. Current pricing and conduct by service providers put older adults at a disadvantage
8. Older adults are concerned about media representations of aging

**2.0 Introduction**

We are submitting this report as an intervention in the “Call for comments on the Governor in Council’s request for a report on future programming distribution models” (CRTC-2017-359) and thereby indicating our intent to provide expertise on the ways in which future changes to audio and video distribution will impact seniors’ aged 60+ (we will refer to this group as older adults from this point on) access to programming. We emphasize the importance of taking older adults’ needs into account before decisions are made about the future of audio and video distribution models, especially considering that Canadian older adults currently outnumber Canadian children. We are submitting this report as an initial intervention with the intent of submitting a more comprehensive report in Phase II.

**2.1 Ageing, Communication, Technologies (ACT)**

Ageing, Communication, Technologies (ACT— www.actproject.ca) is a multi-methodological research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and hosted at Concordia University that brings together researchers and institutional and community partners to address the transformation of the experiences of ageing with the proliferation of new forms of mediated communications in networked societies. ACT is comprised of researchers investigating how ‘digital ageism’ – the individual and systemic biases that create forms of inclusion and exclusion that are age-related – operates in subtle ways.

The world’s population is ageing. One in four people is expected to be over the age of 65 in the next two decades, making ‘the senior citizen’ the largest demographic group in the Western world. At the same time that we are expected to live longer, there has been a proliferation of digital devices, information technologies and mediated systems of communication that network populations globally. There is a need to take into account older adults’ experiences and needs when defining future policy in relation to broadcasting distribution models.

**2.2 Methodology**

This report draws from data gathered in two ways. First, we draw from a pilot focus group with six older women 65+ from diverse ethno cultural backgrounds, all of whom belong to minority groups living in Montréal. We asked them to reflect on their consumption and uses of television and radio, and the ways in which these have changed over the last decade.

Second, we have included findings from surveys conducted as part of the first wave of a large scale cross-national longitudinal study exploring the ways older adults in Canada use traditional and new media/technology. Some 3,560 Canadian older adults responded to a 30-question survey during the first wave of data collection, which took place in 2017.

Third, this report is informed by over ten years of working on research projects dealing with the experiences of older adults in an increasingly digitizing world. This includes heading an international research project on aging, communication and technologies.

Fourth, we draw from our expertise leading digital literacy projects with groups of older adults since 2011, including working with traditionally marginalized groups like women, ethnic, cultural and linguistic minorities, recent immigrants, low-income older adults, and older adults with disabilities.

**3. Key preliminary findings**

**3.1 Older adults tend to rely on television sets and radios to access information and entertainment rather than computers, tablets, or smart phones.**

The ACT longitudinal survey found that individuals aged 75+ watch significantly more television on *television* *sets* than do the 60-64 and 65-69 age groups. Those aged 75+ also preferred listening to radio and watching television over using other media devices, including other digital technologies. Furthermore, these findings are confirmed by a recent CRTC report that indicated that only 17% of adults over 65 were subscribed to Netflix, which stands in stark contrast to 64% of those aged 18 to 34 (CRTC, 2017, p.203). Only 2% of those aged 65+ watch television exclusively online (p. 202). These figures, in addition to the television viewing practices of older adults we interviewed as part of our pilot focus group, lead us to infer that the oldest Canadians continue to rely on traditional television watching practices, which is related to their experience with media as a generational cohort.

Our longitudinal survey found that older adults in lower socioeconomic brackets rely most on traditional television viewing practices. When their income was noted as being “a lot above” average, they indicated that they watched significantly less television on a television set than those who assessed their income as “slightly below” or “a lot below” average. For many older adults, including those who are already marginalized through low income, there exists a strong connection between traditional television sets and radios, and the consumption of television and radio content.

**3.2 Older adults prefer scheduled and consistent programming over on-demand options**

According to the longitudinal survey, few older adults watched television or listened to the radio on their phones, but those who do tend to be younger older adults, and fall within the 60-64 age group, and with higher levels of education and income. Older adults mostly watch television and listen to radio at home or during transportation.

Focus group participants, who were 65+, indicated that they prefer to use radio and television programs in highly scheduled ways, sometimes using specific content to plan their week, memorizing favourite programs and using them to build their personal schedules (e.g., errands, meetings, workouts). This includes wanting to plan in advance, and fondly remembering the printed “tv guide”-like scheduling, which they found they could easily use to plan their television viewing for the week ahead. Planning in advance, they found, is not something that is not easily done with the digital schedules at a glance that are offered as part of cable packages. They often feel overwhelmed by too many choices and do not usually go back to watch programming they have recorded, when they are able to record.

Television and radio programming are part of the ritualsof their everyday lives. Some participants also noted that they have long relied on television and radio programs, their regular scheduled broadcasting and their familiarity, to provide “background noise” and create a sense of companionship.

**3.3 Access to information is a key part of citizenship**

The participants of the longitudinal survey aged 75+ rely significantly more on TV or radio than younger age groups to get “important information” (i.e., outcome of a political election) or “factual information” (i.e., historical date or economic figures). For the older adults we interviewed, watching television and listening to radio, especially the news content they offered, were foundational to their informed participation in a democratic society. They stated that the ability to access content via their devices was crucial to their capacity to remain informed, and they found it to be, using their terms, a “basic right”. Specifically, the participants expressed the need for free and basic television content that includes access to the two 24-hour public broadcast news channels (CBC News Network and RDI). They stated an appreciation ofCBC Radio for its in-depth reporting. This group of older adults found that local, national and international news were all important. They were aware of media bias and recognized the importance of comparing news sources in order to evaluate veracity of information. It is worth pointing out that this group of older adults were highly aware of the media landscape, and, as older adults from minority ethnic backgrounds, they were especially interested in obtaining international perspectives on current events, including accessing information from their countries of origin.

**3.4 Current pricing and conduct by service providers put older adults at a disadvantage**

The participants vociferously lamented a lack of transparency by service providers. Currently, consumers that actively bargain with service providers often receive advantageous pricing for their services, but this requires a level of understanding of digital technologies and contracts that is not necessarily the norm among older adults.Older adults expressed frustration with needing to involve their children or younger friends or relatives in negotiations with service providers to ensure they are treated fairly, can access the same pricing than their younger counterparts, and reach an agreement that is commensurate with their needs. They are aware that if they are not savvy with service providers, they risk being taken advantage of. This means that there is a fear of changing providers because they may end up with more expensive and lower quality services.

Some of the participants have felt undue pressure to add more services through bundling. They do not always need or want the services they are getting, and are worried that they are paying more to get less. Through our years of leading digital literacy workshops in low income building for older adults in Montreal, we have become acutely aware of practices of selling packages to older adults that are disproportionate to their needs or uses. A recent CBC investigation suggests that these high-pressure sales tactics are especially damaging to older adults (Johnson, November 2017). Furthermore, older adults are often convinced to get specialty channels on a trial basis, only for the costs to be added to a future bill. This practice of putting the onus on the consumer to cancel free trials and to begin charging for services after the trial period is perceived as being deceptive.

**3.5 Recent shifts in distribution models have impacted the ways older adults watch television**

Participants explained that with digitization of cable services, they have reduced the number of televisions in their households, getting rid of televisions in their bedrooms or kitchens, for example. An increase in choice is not inherently a good thing from the perspective of our interviewees, as some of them indicated that they often felt overwhelmed by too many choices and could not find the content for which they were looking.

**3.6 Older adults are concerned about media representations of aging and older adults.**

The participants explained that they were concerned about the lack of visibility of older adults on Canadian television and radio programming, especially a dearth of older minorities and older women. They recognize that there are policies pertaining to diversity in Canada, but that these do little to encourage an accurate representation of an aging society.

**4.0 Future steps**

This preliminary report is a first step into a longer intervention that ACT will make as part of Phase II of the CRTC consultative process pertaining to future programming distribution models.

For the next phase, we will continue to analyze the dataset emerging from the first wave of the longitudinal study. We also plan to hold 5-0 additional focus groups, and at least one dozen interviews with adults 60+, seeking more diversity in terms of participants. The focus groups and interviews will be conducted with older adults from various regions in Canada, seeking out both Francophone and Anglophone participants. We also will include input from older adults from the deaf and hard of hearing community, as well from low income older adults. We also will include perspectives of older adults who reside in rural areas.

**5.0 Preliminary recommendations**

Our preliminary report indicates that, care must be taken when analyzing “older adults”. Older adults are not a homogenous group. The ways in which older adults engage with technology and media depend on their socio-economic status, level of education, age, cultural background, gender, and marital status. The ways in which and the level to which they access media are also influenced by these factors. Thus, changes to policy and practices will impact older adults in different ways.

We recommend that the CRTC considers the diversity of needs of older adults and, at the same time, is aware that the needs of affluent older adults are not the same as the needs of older adults in lower socio-economic categories.

Our early findings also indicate that as people age, they carry forth technologies and habits from earlier in their lives (Ratzenböck, 2016). Their ability to adapt to a rapidly changing communications and media environment (because of both technical know-how and financial capacities) may be limited by their past experience but also by their economic status in retirement and This should be taken into account when research informing policy is conducted, so that it does not replicated ageist biases. Today’s adults are tomorrow’s older adults and they too will carry forth technology and communication related habits and routines from their past. Finally, rapid technological changes can further isolate already marginalized groups.

Thus, we recommend that changes to distribution platforms, and the policies that surround them,keep citizens’ needs for communication and information front of mind, knowing that not all citizens can access information from new distribution models.

We also recommend that the diverse and variedneeds of our country’s older adults need to be considered before decisions are made that could potentially take away access to information that is considered to be “essential to citizenship in Canada.”

**6.0 Bibliography**

Canadian Radio-television and telecommunications Commission (CRTC) (2017). *Communications Monitoring Report 2017*. Retrieved from http://crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/PolicyMonitoring/2017/cmr2017.pdf

Johnson, E. (2017, November 19). Bell insider reveals high-pressure sales tactics required on every single call. *CBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/bell-whistleblower-reveals-high-pressure-sales-1.4404088>

Ratzenböck, B. (2016). “Let’s Take a Look Together”: Walking Interviews in Domestic Spaces as a Means to Examine ICT Experiences of Women 60+. *Romanian* *Journal of Communication and Public Relations, 18*(1), 49-64.

**7.0 Appendix A**

Aging, Communication and Technologies’ Longitudinal Study on Older Media Audiences

Preliminary Results / Television and Radio Consumption by Canadian Older

Analysis completed by Martine Lagacé and Lise Van de Beeck

University of Ottawa

November 2017

Context:

 Data was collected among 3,560 Canadian older adults, through a large-scale internet survey aiming to better understand the usage of traditional and new media/technology. Field work started on June 27th 2017 and continued until July 20th 2017. Invitations were sent to 9,719 individuals; 4,646 clicked on the internet link survey and a total of 3,560 completed the questionnaire, for a response rate of 48%. Incomplete questionnaires were discarded (n=763). Data was weighted to allow for statistical analysis (see table: Final Weighted Sample – by Region).

Highlights:

* Individuals aged 75+ year old watch significantly more television on a tv set than 60-64/65-69 year old groups.
* Generally, the higher the number of years of education, the less participants watch television on a television set and/or computer.
* Participants who assess their income as “a lot above” watch significantly less television on a television set than individuals who assess their income as “slightly below” or “a lot below”.
* Single (with no children) individuals watch significantly more television on a television set than married participants (with or without children). Married participants (with children) also watch less television on a television set than individuals that are divorced or widowed, with or without children. As for radio, widowed (with or without children) listen to radio on a radio set significantly more than married (with or without children) participants.
* There are no significant age group differences as for the time spent listening to an MP3, CD player or Wifi radio; Likewise, as for watching video, DVD, TV box, or hard disk recordings.
* Media equipment significantly varies according to age groups. The 60-64 year old group possess significantly more audio and video equipment (with the exception of the video recorder and the CD player for which the 75+ year old group possess significantly more).
* Watching TV or listening to radio on the mobile phone is mostly done by the 60-64 year old participants.
* Participants of all age groups listen to radio mostly at home on during transportation; a similar pattern emerges as for the television (watching it mostly at home).
* Preferred media activity when participants have free time: the 60-64 year old individuals would significantly watch more videos or DVDs than older individuals. However, the 75+ year old individuals prefer would prefer listening to radio and watching television.
* What sources of information to turn to, to get “important information (i.e. outcome of a political election) or “factual information” (Q20, i.e. historical date or economic figure)? In both cases, results suggest that the 75+ year old individuals rely significantly more on television or radio than do other age groups.
* The more positive is the subjective assessment of heath and global life satisfaction, the less individuals watch television, on a television set. Other television settings are not significantly correlated with these two variables.

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| **Personnes âgées et technologies** **Sociodemographic Profile / Canadian Data** |









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| Q28-29 Subjective Health and Life Satisfaction  |



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| **Personnes âgées et Technologies** **TELEVISION AND RADIO CONSUMPTION / CANADIAN DATA** **Summary** |

 Data was weighted to allow inferential statistical analysis (see following table: *Final Weighted Sample – by Region*).

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| **ample – Final Weighted Sample – By Region** |
| **British Columbia**  | **ABritish Columbia** | **Alberta** | **Manitoba/Saskatchewan** | **Ontario** | **Quebec** | **Atlantic** |
| **Gender**  |
| Male  | **47%**  | **48%**  | **46%**  | **46%**  | **46%**  | **47%**  |
| Female  | **53%**  | **52%**  | **54%**  | **54%**  | **54%**  | **53%**  |
| **Age**  |
| Between 60 and 64  | **28%**  | **31%**  | **28%**  | **27%**  | **27%**  | **28%**  |
| Between 65 and 69  | **24%**  | **24%**  | **23%**  | **24%**  | **24%**  | **25%**  |
| Between 70 and 74  | **17%**  | **16%**  | **16%**  | **17%**  | **18%**  | **18%**  |
| 75 or older  | **31%**  | **29%**  | **33%**  | **32%**  | **31%**  | **29%**  |

[[1]](#footnote-2)Data highlighted in yellow indicate significant statistical differences.

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| ***Q1 – Time spent on media*** |



***-Individuals aged 75+ watch significantly more television on a tv set than 60-64/65-69 year old groups.***



***-Participants living in Alberta listen significantly more radio on a radio set than do Ontarian older adults.***



**-*Generally, the higher the number of years of education, the less participants watch television on a tv set and/or computer. Precisely, participants that have about 12 years of education watch significantly more television on a tv set than those who have about 13-14 years or 16 and more years education. More so, participants who hold 10-11 years of education significantly more television on a computer than those who have 12 years or 15 and more.***



-***Participants who assess their income as “a lot above” watch significantly less television on a tv set than individuals who assess their income as “slightly below” or “a lot below”. The same pattern emerges between “slightly above” and “a lot below” groups.***



***-Single (with no children) individuals watch significantly more television on a tv set than married participants (with or without children). Married participants (with children) also watch less television on a tv set than individuals that are divorced or widowed, with or without children. As for radio, widowed (with or without children) listen to radio on a radio set significantly more than married (with or without children) participants.***

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| ***Q4 and 5 – Time spent on audio and video*** |



***-There are no significant age group differences as for the time spent listening to an MP3, CD player or Wifi radio; Likewise, as for watching video, DVD, TV box, or hard disk recordings.***

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| **Q3 – Frequencies** |



***-Media equipment significantly varies according to age groups. The 60-64 year old group possess significantly more audio and video equipment (with the exception of the video recorder and the CD player for which the 75+ year old group possess significantly more). The latter group actually possesses more media equipment than do the 70-74 group.***

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| **Q7 – Frequencies** |



***-Watching TV or listening to radio on the mobile phone is mostly done by the 60-64 year old participants.***

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| **Q12 and Q13 – Frequencies** |



***-Participants of all age groups, listen to radio mostly at home on during transportation; a similar pattern emerges as for the television (watching it mostly at home).***

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| **Q16, Q18 and Q20 – Frequencies** |



***Q#16 asks participants what is their preferred media activity when they have free time: results indicate that 60-64 year old individuals would significantly watch more videos or DVDs than older individuals. However, the 75+ year old individuals prefer would prefer listing to radio and watching tv.***

***Q#18 and Q#20 ask participants which sources of information they would rely on to get some “important information (Q18, i.e. outcome of a political election) or “factual information” (Q20, i.e. historical date or economic figure): in both cases, results suggest that the 75+ year old individuals rely significantly more on tv or radio than would other age groups.***

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| **Q1, Q28, Q29 – Correlations** |



***-The more positive is the subjective assessment of heath and global life satisfaction, the less individuals watch TV, on a TV set. Other TV settings are not significantly correlated with these two variables.***

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)