

BOLD THINKING

WHAT CANADIAN CULTURE CREATORS WANT YOU TO KNOW

2015: THE YEAR
OF FAIRNESS

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**“THE INTERNET NOW
OFFERS US A GREAT WAY
TO FORECAST TRENDS
AND UNDERSTAND OUR
CULTURE”**

NATIONAL Public Relations, Canada's largest public relations consulting firm, with Sonic Boom, A Customer Experience Agency, have collaborated with reddit, the "front-page of the internet", on a study of the key themes and values driving online discussions and judgements. The results of this study will help organizations to better understand emerging beliefs that inform the decisions of Canadians on a daily basis. These decisions include which product to buy, issues to support (or oppose), or advocacy actions to take.

This is the first **Bold Thinking Report**, which will be published annually.

As communicators, we're looking to better understand audiences, forecast trends, engrain our clients' brands and products or services into the fabric of community-based conversations, and drive advocacy organically in an increasingly crowded marketplace.

Leaders in organizations are looking to stay current with evolving Internet culture and the evolving needs of audiences to ensure business models stay relevant. Those interested in Internet culture are looking to better understand its impact on society and how it influences the nature of relationships.

The Internet is far from chaotic. Indeed, behind every new idea, meme¹, community and movement are people. Driven by a distinct set of shared beliefs and values, online activity reflects people's view of the world and guides their responses to situations and brands. So why are certain brands revered online, while others can't seem to do anything right? Is there a discernible pattern to why some things turn into trends? Why do certain ideas turn into memes while others just fizzle away? And can we peek into the future by listening to the conversations online today?

With these questions in mind, we began to look for dominant patterns in online discourse to identify the underlying value and belief systems that determine how the most influential online audiences behave in various contexts.

Why study dominant discourse on the Internet?

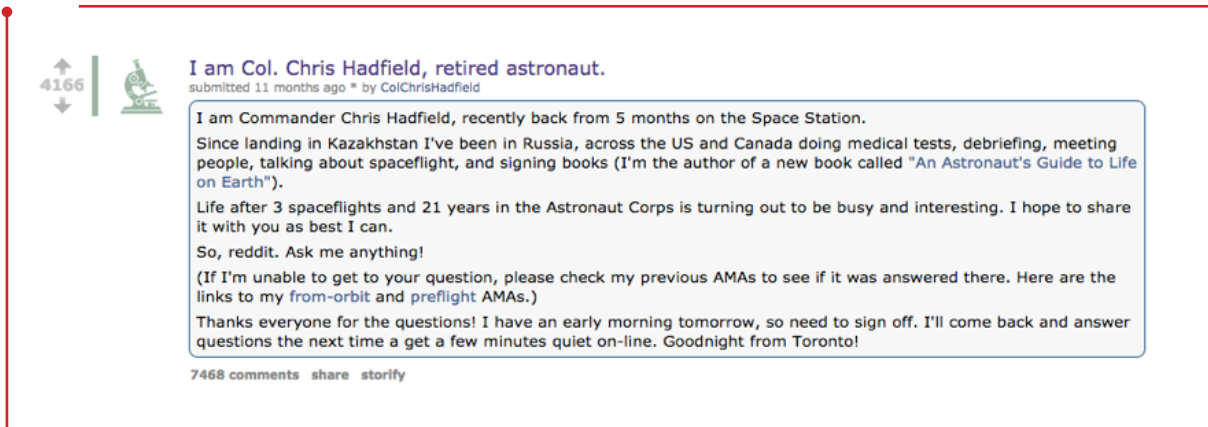
Enabling an unprecedented level of exchange of information, ideas and points of view, the Internet plays a key role in defining trends and mobilizing public opinion. In this new reality, having a finger on the pulse of online conversation in any given context can become a competitive advantage for all organizations.

¹ A meme is "an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture." A meme acts as a unit for carrying cultural ideas and symbols that can be transmitted from one mind to another, in this case, through the Internet.

INTRODUCTION

Leveraging reddit.com

Over the past few years, reddit.com has emerged as one of the most influential communities on the Internet, launching everything from memes about popular culture to global campaigns. Widely regarded as the “front page of the Internet”, reddit is frequented by early adopters of technology, geeks and culture creators. It has attracted the attention of some of the world’s most prominent artists, writers, politicians and leaders. Bill Gates, Barack Obama, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sir David Attenborough, Chris Hadfield and many more have participated in live discussions on reddit, in the hope of influencing public opinion of various issues and campaigns.



The screenshot shows a Reddit post from user ColChrisHadfield, titled "I am Col. Chris Hadfield, retired astronaut." The post has 4166 upvotes and 7468 comments. The content of the post is as follows:

I am Col. Chris Hadfield, retired astronaut.
submitted 11 months ago [•] by ColChrisHadfield

I am Commander Chris Hadfield, recently back from 5 months on the Space Station.
Since landing in Kazakhstan I've been in Russia, across the US and Canada doing medical tests, debriefing, meeting people, talking about spaceflight, and signing books (I'm the author of a new book called "An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth").
Life after 3 spaceflights and 21 years in the Astronaut Corps is turning out to be busy and interesting. I hope to share it with you as best I can.
So, reddit. Ask me anything!
(If I'm unable to get to your question, please check my previous AMAs to see if it was answered there. Here are the links to my [from-orbit](#) and [preflight](#) AMAs.)
Thanks everyone for the questions! I have an early morning tomorrow, so need to sign off. I'll come back and answer questions the next time a get a few minutes quiet on-line. Goodnight from Toronto!

7468 comments share storify

Last year, reddit drew over 731 million visitors from across the globe, including more than 7.4 million Canadians each month with an average visit lasting more than 18 minutes. The numbers are staggering.

The analysis of discourse in the online world through reddit allows us to look at thousands of online conversations on a variety of topics – from religion and politics to healthcare and technology – and apply a social sciences lens to the data. This enables us to identify emerging value and belief systems that define communities of people; the narratives created around brands, products and industries; and the future impact of events on public perception.

Some notable events showcasing reddit's influence on the Internet include:

- Through the support of the reddit community, comedian Louis C.K. has sold over a million dollars' worth of online content.
- In 2009, reddit started the largest "Secret Santa" gift exchange in the world. In 2013 it boasted 117,956 participants from 160 countries, and almost \$4 million spent in gifts and shipping.
- In 2012, reddit influenced an Internet blackout to protest the Stop Online Piracy Act in the United States. Other participants included Google and Wikipedia.
- The reddit community raises awareness, money and resources for various issues that matter: \$600,000 in support of public education, \$185,000 to rebuild Haiti, \$65,000 within 24 hours for an orphanage in Kenya, a community dedicated to the act of ordering pizza for someone in need of a helping hand, \$30,000 for a terminally ill cancer patient, etc., etc.
- Given reddit's significant presence on the Internet and its impact, the community can clearly be leveraged as both a gateway to current online culture and as a portent of future trends.

↑ 3345
↓
Louis C.K. is cutting out the middleman and selling his Beacon Theatre performance for 5 dollars with an instant download. He also wrote a little blurb about torrenting, and it really got me. (self.technology)
submitted 2 years ago* by TCanDaMan

"To those who might wish to "torrent" this video: look, I don't really get the whole "torrent" thing. I don't know enough about it to judge either way. But I'd just like you to consider this: I made this video extremely easy to use against well-informed advice. I was told that it would be easier to torrent the way I made it, but I chose to do it this way anyway, because I want it to be easy for people to watch and enjoy this video in any way they want without "corporate" restrictions. Please bear in mind that I am not a company or a corporation. I'm just some guy. I paid for the production and posting of this video with my own money. I would like to be able to post more material to the fans in this way, which makes it cheaper for the buyer and more pleasant for me. So, please help me keep this being a good idea. I can't stop you from torrenting; all I can do is politely ask you to pay your five little dollars, enjoy the video, and let other people find it in the same way."

Sincerely, Louis C.K.

If you're looking to buy the stand up special, here's the link as well.

<https://buy.louisck.net/purchase>

2309 comments share

2015 will be the year of fairness

To understand the dominant beliefs and values that are emerging among Canadians, we searched and analyzed over 20,000 conversations amongst Canadian redditors around topics pertaining to government, business and society at large.

Focusing on these three areas allowed us to identify emerging trends in consumer culture, as reddit members debated thousands of topics from CRTC rulings to the actions of companies, political leaders and individuals who have had an impact on redditors' day-to-day lives. While topics we analyzed were diverse, a single unifying thread emerged: fairness.

To the members of reddit, fairness is about being impartial when in a position of power. In that context, governments and lawmakers are often criticized by redditors for abusing their powers and granting unfair advantages to certain parties.

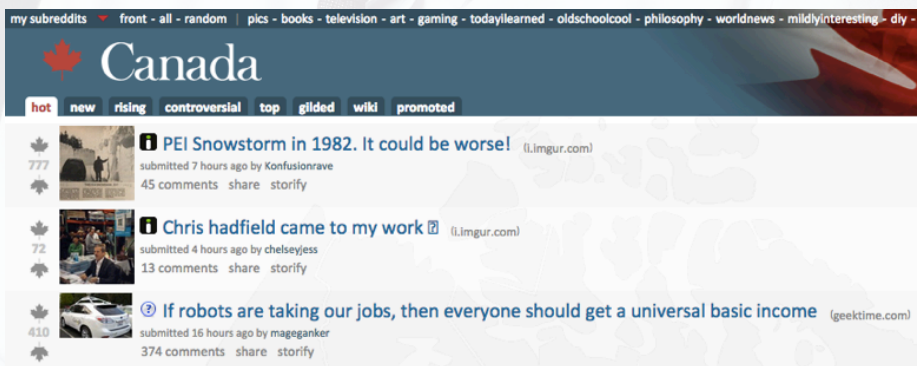
Fairness is also about a having moral code and a sense of personal and social responsibility. Those in positions of authority or power are held to a higher standard and their actions are judged accordingly.

These elements of impartiality and responsibility constitute a sense of fairness in the minds of Canadian reddit members, many of whom are artists, technologists and early adopters sitting on the bleeding edge of our culture. In 2015, the words and actions of businesses, government and people perceived to have power will be viewed through the fairness lens.

NEW HODDOLLOGY

At the outset, we identified and analyzed thousands of online conversations relevant to Canadian reddit users across a range of topics. These included government and politics, economics, corporations and brands, people and culture. Our process began with identifying the 50 most popular sub-reddits (sub-communities on various topics within reddit.com) among Canadian users. Within each of these 50 sub-reddits, we identified the 50 topics with the most engagement over the past 12 months, resulting in 2,500 identified topics and over 20,000 comments.

We then identified patterns and interpreted meanings behind the words being used by audiences to communicate with one another. This enabled us to identify the underlying values, beliefs and attributes that inform consumer perceptions, understand how online activity shapes discourse and relationships in various industries, and establish baselines for forecasting future trends.



The Canada 'subreddit' on reddit.com

1. Impartiality

1.1 Consumers will be especially sensitive to perceptions of collusion between business and government.

While collusion is a topic of ongoing debate in the community, it is also notably seen as an inhibitor of innovation. This is because in various sectors of Canadian business, redditors believe that laws and regulations are often put in place to protect the interests of established businesses, making it very difficult for smaller or newer companies to compete effectively within existing business models, products and services. To the community, this breeds an environment where innovation is stifled. Commonly cited sectors here include telecommunications, entertainment and banking/personal finance.

One of the reasons why Canadian redditors feel so passionately about innovation is that they see it as a responsibility of the business community. When innovation is hindered (through restrictive public policy, for example), this becomes an issue of fairness, and the reputation of those involved is negatively impacted. For instance, the current debate over Uber's disruptive technology and various governments' responses will be closely watched by those on reddit.

Hot Topic

Telecommunications - Lacking a competitive spirit

While Canadian redditors are upset about Verizon's failed attempt at entering the Canadian marketplace, they are more upset about the lack of government intervention in creating competition in the telecommunications sector. Community members increasingly believe that most telcos in the country are happy maintaining their market position.

1.2 Audiences will care about how organizations treat their employees, as this is seen as a reflection of how fair they are.

People want to know that the companies they're doing business with are socially progressive, inclusive and fair-minded. These values, when manifested through action, and reported through the lens of employees themselves, will positively impact corporate reputation.

Hot Topic

Retail - Retailers taking advantage of their workers

The issue of wage disparity is taking centre stage, with the retail sector being singled out for its "unfair" practices. Audiences believe that most large retailers "work around the system" by hiring part-time labour at the lowest costs and having them work full-time hours. This is resulting in negative perceptions towards certain retailers and is creating a culture of "guilty pleasure" - where shoppers will feel embarrassed to publicly talk about the fact that they purchased products at a given retailer.

2. Personal and Social Responsibility

2.1 Audiences will care about what you (as a leader or a business) do with your position of privilege and power.

Organizations should market their products and services in a fair and ethical manner. This is particularly evident in the healthcare, financial and energy sectors, where consumers will want companies to educate them through evidence-based research and scientific information. They'll also want companies to openly address counter claims rather than refusing to acknowledge them.

Consumers will also keep a close eye on the lobbying efforts of organizations, especially when it directly impacts consumer access to information. Net neutrality will remain a hot topic here, and telecommunications and media companies, for instance, will continue to be scrutinized for any attempts to limit consumer access through throttling² or other similar practices.

Pharmaceuticals - It's all about access

Consumers on reddit are preoccupied with the issue of fair access to treatments and drugs. While most agree that pharma companies should be fairly compensated for years of research and development, they also believe that these companies should provide free or low-cost access to drugs to those less privileged.

Hot Topic

Pharmaceuticals - A moral obligation to educate

Redditors hold a common perception that pharma companies selectively disseminate information about products and treatment options. While audiences do often cite and recognize the regulatory constraints placed on the pharmaceutical industry in terms of what it can and can't say to Canadians, community members also believe that since these businesses operate in the life sciences, they need to be held to a greater standard of responsibility – one of which is to help educate Canadians about health and wellness.

Hot Topic

Personal Finance - People taking on more debt than they need to

Lending terms established by banks are viewed negatively, especially when it comes to personal mortgages. Community members express concern about financial institutions offering people conditions that result in more debt than their incomes allow, keeping the real estate markets inflated and putting consumers at risk of default when rates increase.

Hot Topic

Energy - Government taking decisions at the cost of consumers

While the government's efforts to develop renewable sources is commended, community members believe that there needs to be a better transition plan and greater attention paid to how the costs are distributed among energy producers, government bodies, taxpayers and consumers.

Hot Topic

¹ "Throttling" is the term applied to the intentional slowing down of some content delivery or the speeding up of other content by Internet Service Providers ("ISPs").

2.2 People will rely a lot more on each other in the coming year, while reducing expectations in government.

This year, members of the reddit community will feel an even greater sense of personal responsibility to step in and contribute to issues affecting their country or community. Whether it's to raise money for someone suffering from a disease, lobbying the government for net neutrality, or holding the world's largest Secret Santa gift exchange, audiences will increasingly band together to drive positive change in society. This is primarily due to the emerging perception that governments and leaders cannot be relied upon to make decisions in the best interest of the nation and its people.

Interestingly, we believe that this trend will increase the social pressures Canadians feel in 2015 to get involved in an issue or cause; correspondingly, a lack of involvement will be taken as a sign of lacking personal responsibility.

Hot Topic

Telecommunications - Net Neutrality concerns drive the community to take action

The influence of US laws on Canada is a big point of concern for community members, especially as it pertains to laws around Net Neutrality. Canadian redditors are worried about the increasing likelihood of Canadian ISPs following the American model of "throttling" whereby partners (such as Netflix, Google, Amazon) who pay more are given greater priority and bandwidth. In effect, this transforms the open Internet into a controlled system of content delivery.

To support the issue, many redditors are rallying citizens in various cities and towns to raise their concerns with the CRTC, join forces and take action with other community members. This is a good example of Canadians taking collective action due to a diminished trust in government to act independently and in their interest.

2.3 Corporations that promote and foster entrepreneurship will be celebrated.

Just as innovation is seen by redditors as a responsibility of business and a critical success factor for Canadian prosperity, so too is entrepreneurship. With reduced trust in government to foster new enterprise, audiences will look towards corporations to create opportunities for small- and medium-sized business owners. Consequently, companies that do a great job at promoting entrepreneurs will be positively viewed by the community.

Hot Topic

Personal Finance - Support for banks that help entrepreneurs

Consumers express positive sentiment towards financial institutions in the country that help and promote entrepreneurs. For example, firsthand accounts of entrepreneurs working with select banks drive very positive discourse around their customer services, products, and even ethics.

NOISY SUSTAINABLE CONNECTION

In a world where we no longer simply buy something, but rather prefer to buy into something, understanding the emerging trends in consumer value systems can play a significant role in shaping corporate reputation. It can point us in a direction that we may not have explored in the past or even under-utilized. It can guide our responses when situations arise, and ensure that issues are handled in a manner that will build relationships with audiences rather than alienate them.

Increasingly, values are driving decisions to purchase goods and services, brand advocacy and corporate reputation. Understanding where these values are headed can allow business leaders to find common ground between the values of their organization and those of the public.

At the end of the day, we believe that organizations that understand the evolving beliefs and values of their audiences will be poised to build deeper, enduring and more emotional relationships with their customers and prospects in 2015. Even more so, organizations that understand how [fairness plays into their operations](#) (from corporate communications through to corporate responsibility) will have a greater opportunity to connect with the values of their stakeholders and be part of the ongoing dialogue amongst audiences, rather than having to pick and choose the right moment to participate.



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