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LOOKING BACKWARD, LOOKING FORWARD: PART 3

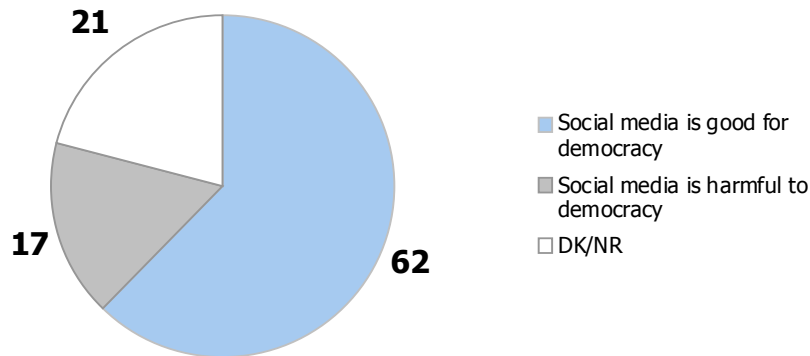
FORCE THREE: SOCIAL MEDIA ISN'T HELPING

[Ottawa – January 3, 2013] Internet 2.0 (surely we are at least at 3.0) is transforming our society in ways we couldn't even have imagined twenty five years ago. The Internet is the new mass media and social media is now the avidly consumed by most Canadians, particularly those below our median age of 41 years (it was around 26 at the last Centennial celebrations of 1967)¹.

This isn't merely a change to our popular culture; social media is at the heart of the North American economy with the Facebook IPO the biggest economic event of the past year. Notably, on the day that Facebook purchased Instagram (still too fresh a name to be recognized by my spell check) for one billion dollars the venerable New York Times was valued at 900 million dollars.

Figure 3-1: Role of social media in democracy

Q. As you know, the use of social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter has increased dramatically in recent years. Some people argue that social media is good for democracy since it offers new ways of participating in politics and communicating with the public. Other people argue that social networking is harmful to democracy, since many people will use these websites as a substitute for real world action. Which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?



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BASE: Canadians; December 14-21, 2011 (n=2,005)

When we ask the public their views on what impacts social media are having on overall quality of life in general and democratic health more particularly, the responses are overwhelmingly positive (see Figure 3-1). Virtually everyone thinks that social media is a liberating force which is enriching and broadening democratic and societal health. Putting aside the irony that this consensus comes at a time when barometers of democratic health are at historical low points in

¹ Source: Statistics Canada, "Population by broad age groups and sex, counts, including median age, 1921 to 2011 for both sexes – Canada", 2011 Census. Accessible online at <http://goo.gl/ziubF>

our tracking, we are left puzzled about these nearly unanimous thumbs up on the salubrious impacts of social media.

Clearly, there are many wonderful applications of social media and as an enthusiastic fan of twitter I can attest to its value, fun and occasional danger. It is still puzzling to see how in an era where mistrust and scepticism are both very high, social media has largely escaped critical public scrutiny. I will leave the question of the plausibility of building a future economy on the rather ephemeral world of social media to more qualified experts. I will, however, note that the Facebook IPO has become the 'Faceplant' event in the minds of burned investors and I never really understood how 'poking' our way to recovery was a solid long-term strategy for fending off the emerging Asian economies.

In Canada, there has been an explosion of interest in the use of social media as a form of political expression. Online communities and petitions abound and the Twitterverse is awash in critical commentary of the most dramatic sort. In work presented after the last federal election, Mike Colledge of Ipsos noted that during the 41st election campaign, the tone of the Internet shifted from a relatively balanced ideological tone to a decidedly more left of center tone². More notably, this bore no resemblance to the outcome of the election itself.

Some have argued that the less strenuous 'click' democracy available to denizens of the social media universe is becoming an ersatz touchstone which occludes the importance of authentic political participation. Moreover, those who vigorously contest the policies of the day in the world of social media, and who believe that this is really making a difference become more embittered as this delusion is shattered in the real world of elections. In Canada, younger voting hasn't risen in tandem with the rise of social media (quite the contrary). Social media are crucial tools to fund raising and political mobilisation as we have seen in the past American election (where youth voting was much higher than in Canada's last federal election).

On a final note, it is worth taking a look at the socioeconomic demographics (i.e., income and education) underlying today's 'social mediaphiles'. In the past, Internet consumption was positively associated with socioeconomic status (SES) and labour force outcome. Our most recent labour force study, however, suggests that high social media consumers now display lower SES and are faring more poorly in the labour market³.

In the past year, Allan Gregg delivered a penetrating and courageous critique of the current government where he likened the current regime's strategy to political techniques evident in the nightmarish world of 1984⁴. While applauding this speech, I would demur on the reference to

² See Colledge, Mike "The 2011 Federal Election: Lessons Learned", presentation to the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association, September 22, 2011. Accessible online at: <http://goo.gl/pVHPY>

³ Note: This data is drawn from an unreleased EKOS study titled *Rethinking Work*, which discovered a negative correlation between social media use and socioeconomic factors/labour force outcomes. The data is set to be released later this year.

⁴ See Gregg, Allan, "1984 in 2012 – The Assault on Reason", notes for remarks to Carleton University, September 5, 2012. Accessible online at: <http://allangregg.com/?p=80>

Orwell and the notion that individual rights have been usurped in the service of totalitarian control (I do agree heartily with the assault on reason theme).

Instead, I return to Neil Postman's seminal 1985 book entitled *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. In this work Postman argues that it is Huxley's *Brave New World* which is a more prescient dystopia than Orwell's *1984*. The citizen surrenders their rights unconsciously in a never ending pursuit of mindless entertainment.

Perhaps social media has become the *soma* of the twenty-first century.

Detailed Tables

<u>Role of Social Media in Democracy</u>					
<i>Q. As you know, the use of social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter has increased dramatically in recent years. Some people argue that social media is good for democracy since it offers new ways of participating in politics and communicating with the public. Other people argue that social networking is harmful to democracy, since many people will use these websites as a substitute for real world action. Which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?</i>					
	Social media is good for democracy	Social media is harmful to democracy	DK/NR	Sample Size	Margin of Error (+/-)
NATIONALLY	62%	17%	21%	2005	2.2
REGION					
British Columbia	67%	14%	19%	262	6.1
Alberta	69%	14%	17%	207	6.8
Saskatchewan/Manitoba	60%	13%	27%	130	8.6
Ontario	64%	14%	22%	873	3.3
Quebec	56%	24%	20%	420	4.8
Atlantic Canada	56%	21%	23%	113	9.2
GENDER					
Male	63%	18%	20%	1051	3.0
Female	62%	16%	22%	893	3.3
AGE					
<25	73%	14%	13%	218	6.6
25-44	68%	14%	19%	634	3.9
45-64	59%	18%	23%	727	3.6
65+	51%	22%	27%	370	5.1
EDUCATION					
High school or less	49%	22%	29%	314	5.5
College or CEGEP	57%	20%	23%	627	3.9
University or higher	70%	13%	17%	1046	3.0
CURRENT VOTE INTENTION					
Conservative Party	53%	23%	24%	625	3.9
NDP	69%	13%	18%	541	4.2
Liberal Party	71%	12%	17%	492	4.4
Green Party	55%	27%	18%	108	9.4
Bloc Quebecois	68%	11%	21%	114	9.2
Other	47%	20%	33%	28	18.5
Undecided	43%	14%	43%	87	10.5

Methodology

This series draws on data collected from **four separate surveys**. Two of these surveys used Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology, which allows respondents to enter their preferences by punching the keypad on their phone, rather than telling them to an operator.

In an effort to reduce the coverage bias of landline only RDD, we created a dual landline/cell phone RDD sampling frame for this research. As a result, we are able to reach those with a landline and cell phone, as well as cell phone only households and landline only households. This dual frame yields a near perfect unweighted distribution on age group and gender, something almost never seen with traditional landline RDD sample or interviewer-administered surveys. This methodology is not to be confused with the increasing proliferation of non-probability opt-in online panels which have recently been incorrectly reported in major national media with inappropriate margin of error estimates.

The field dates for the **first survey** are February 21-28, 2012. In total, a random sample of 3,699 Canadians aged 18 and over responded to the survey. The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/-1.6 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The field dates for the **second survey** are November 20 – December 3, 2012. In total, a random sample of 5,433 Canadians aged 18 and over responded to the survey (including a sub-sample of 4,548 decided and leaning voters). The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/-1.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The two remaining surveys were conducted exclusively online using EKOS' unique, hybrid online/telephone research panel, *Probit*. Our panel offers exhaustive coverage of the Canadian population (i.e., Internet, phone, cell phone), random recruitment (in other words, participants are recruited randomly, they do not opt themselves into our panel), and equal probability sampling. All respondents to our panel are recruited by telephone using random digit dialling and are confirmed by live interviewers. Unlike opt-in online panels, *Probit* supports margin of error estimates. We believe this to be the only probability-based online panel in Canada.

The field dates for the **third survey** are December 14-21, 2011. In total, 2,005 Canadians aged 18 and over responded to the survey. The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/-2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The field dates for the **fourth survey** are November 20-29, 2012. In total, 1,181 Canadians aged 18 and over responded to the survey. The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/-2.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Please note that the margin of error increases when the results are sub-divided (i.e., error margins for sub-groups such as region, sex, age, education). All the data have been statistically weighted to ensure the samples composition reflects that of the actual population of Canada according to Census data.