



Government
of Canada

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Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – April 2020

Executive Summary

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Canada 

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Communications and Consultation Secretariat of the Privy Council Office (PCO) commissioned The Strategic Counsel (TSC) to conduct continuous cycles of focus group research across the country with members of the public on key national issues, events, and policy initiatives related to the Government of Canada.

The broad purpose of this ongoing qualitative research program is three-fold: to explore the dimensions and drivers of public opinion on the most important issues facing the country; to assess perceptions and expectations of the federal government's actions and priorities, and; to inform the development of Government of Canada communications so that they continue to be aligned with the perspectives and information needs of Canadians, while remaining both clear and easy-to-understand.

The research is intended to be used by the Communications and Consultation Secretariat within PCO in order to fulfill its mandate of supporting the Prime Minister's Office in coordinating government communications. Specifically, the research will ensure that PCO has an ongoing understanding of Canadians' opinions on macro-level issues of interest to the government, as well as emerging trends.

This report includes findings from 12 online focus groups which were conducted between April 1st and 29th, 2020 in multiple locations across the country including in the Atlantic region, Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. Details concerning the locations, recruitment, and composition of the groups are shown in the section below.

The research for this cycle of focus groups focussed on COVID-19, as the pandemic and its affects increased across Canada. The research explored a wide range of related issues in depth, from degree of personal impact, to how Canadians are handling isolation and stay at home directives, perceptions of the federal government's response to date, views on economic impact of the virus, and discussion around re-opening business. Most groups also included the testing of a series of advertising concepts or messages aimed at communicating with the public about COVID-19.

As a note of caution when interpreting the results from this study, findings of qualitative research are directional in nature only and cannot be attributed quantitatively to the overall population under study with any degree of confidence.

Methodology

Overview of Groups

Target audience

- Canadian residents, 18 and older
- Groups were split primarily by gender

Detailed approach

- 12 focus groups across various regions in Canada
- Groups were conducted in Small Town Quebec (Apr. 1st), GTA – Parents (Apr.2nd), Lower Mainland British Columbia – Newcomers (Apr. 7th), Montreal – Youth (Apr. 8th), Small Town Quebec (Apr. 9th), Southwest Ontario – Unemployed/laid-off due to COVID-19 (Apr. 14th), Lower Mainland British Columbia (Apr. 15th), Rural Quebec – Seniors (Apr. 16th), Edmonton (Apr. 21st), Montreal (Apr. 23rd), Rural Quebec (Apr. 27th), and Rural Atlantic (Apr.29th)
- Groups in Quebec were conducted in French, while all others were conducted in English
- All groups for this cycle were conducted online
- A total of 8 participants were recruited for each group, assuming 6 to 8 participants would attend
- Each participant received an \$90 honorarium in respect of their time
- Across all locations, 87 participants attended, in total. Details on attendance numbers by group can be found below.

Group Locations and Composition

LOCATION	GROUP	LANGUAGE	DATE	TIME (EST)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Small Towns - Quebec	1	French	April 1	5:00-7:00 pm	General Population	7
GTA - 905	2	English	April 2	4:00-6:00 pm	Parents	8
Lower Mainland BC	3	English	April 7	8:00-10:00 pm	Newcomers	6
Montreal, QC	4	French	April 8	6:00-8:00 pm	Youth	8
Small Towns - Quebec	5	French	April 9	5:00-7:00 pm	General Population	7
SW Ontario	6	English	April 14	3:00-5:00 pm	Unemployed due to COVID-19	6
Lower Mainland BC	7	English	April 15	8:00-10:00 pm	General Population	8
Rural Quebec	8	French	April 16	4:00-6:00 pm	Seniors (55+)	6
Edmonton, AB	9	English	April 21	7:30-9:30 pm	General Population	8
Montreal, QC	10	French	April 23	6:00-8:00 pm	General Population	7
Rural Quebec	11	French	April 27	5:00-7:00 pm	General Population	8
Rural Atlantic	12	English	April 29	4:00-6:00 pm	General Population	8
Total number of participants						87

Key Findings

The April 2020 wave of focus groups was undertaken while all regions of Canada remained under guidance to continue to follow social distancing and self-isolation protocols. During the month, a total of 12 focus groups were conducted. Groups were held each week, starting on April 1st and running through to the 29th, comprising specific demographic groups (i.e., parents, youth, immigrants, unemployed/laid off due to COVID-19, etc.) or a cross-section of the general population. Due to the fact that groups were held online rather than in-location, participants in some groups were drawn from across specific regions or from different types of communities, including rural, small towns and larger urban centers. A select number of groups were held in particular centers, such as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Edmonton and Montreal, while others were more regionally based (i.e., southwestern Ontario, rural Quebec, and rural Atlantic Canada, etc.).

COVID-19 in the News (All Locations)

In all focus groups, regardless of location or composition, participants were asked about what they had heard recently on the topic of COVID-19. Many responded that they were paying close attention to daily briefings by political leadership in their own jurisdictions and at the federal level, as well as those held by public health officials.

Participants get their news and information about COVID-19 from a wide range of sources, including traditional media, such as TV, print and radio, as well as social media, although many are conscious of misinformation being spread via the latter. Other sources include family, friends, colleagues, medical professionals and journals/publications, in addition to employers. For those with connections overseas, information from abroad is another source, giving these participants more of an 'international' lens on the issue and, specifically impacting their view on how Canada is faring relative to other countries.

What participants have heard varies widely, but tended to center on several specific topics reflecting both the nature of the information being disseminated as well as participants' evolving interests and need for information as they were learning more about the virus. Many participants focused on statistics and data such as the number of cases in their province, in Canada and around the world, in addition to information about how the virus spreads and who is more/less at risk of contracting it. Others were clearly absorbing messaging about the symptoms as well as how to prevent the spread of the virus, including communications on social distancing, self-isolation and handwashing. In the latter half of the month in particular, participants began to mention hearing about plans to re-open and ease restrictions in some jurisdictions.

Awareness of specific issues did vary:

- The prevalence of the virus within long-term care facilities was raised more frequently in Quebec;
- In Southwestern Ontario participants expressed confusion about the need to wear a face mask, indicating that the guidance on this seemed to be changing over time, creating a lack of clarity;
- In Montreal, a group comprised of youth, were asked specifically about anything they had heard about COVID-19 specific to their age group. While a number of participants had heard something about closure of parks and other venues often frequented by younger people, many spoke about the laissez-faire attitude of young people in regards to the practice of social distancing; and
- Most participants to groups in the GTA and of participants residing in smaller towns in Quebec, the only two locations where this question was posed, had heard about mandatory self-isolation for people returning to Canada.

Government of Canada's Response to COVID-19 (All Locations)

Many were aware of at least some of the Government of Canada's actions in response to COVID-19, although the breadth and depth of participants' knowledge of initiatives and announcements was variable by location and the date on which the group was held. As is frequently the case, many

participants had difficulty associating specific activities or actions with a particular level of government. Nevertheless, a key takeaway in many groups was that governments at all levels, including the Government of Canada, were active, engaged and helping individual Canadians.

Participants were generally aware of those initiatives that had been announced most recently, relative to the date on which the focus group was held, even if they did not fully understand all the details. Overall, the consensus was that the sum of the initiatives announced was positive, and that the Government of Canada's responses has been appropriate.

Participants were, on balance, more aware of supports for individuals, specifically the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), relative to initiatives aimed at employers such as the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS). Smaller numbers were familiar with announcements of increases to the Canada Child Benefit, deferral of mortgage payments and property taxes, extension to the deadline for filing tax returns and other measures being taken to support specific groups. Others, although again relatively few, did indicate some awareness around shortages of medical equipment, specifically personal protective equipment (PPE) for health care workers, and ongoing attempts by the Canadian Government to negotiate with what they viewed to be an intransigent U.S. government. Most felt the Government took the right approach by appealing to common interest and reminding the U.S. Government about the degree to which medical trade and services between the two countries are integrated.

Generally, Canada was thought to be handling the COVID-19 outbreak relatively well, especially in comparison to other countries such as the U.S., but also other countries where the outbreak has been much more severe including Italy, Spain, France and Brazil. Countries that were viewed as responding better included Germany, New Zealand, South Korea, Sweden, India and Iceland. These opinions were based on reacting to the crisis earlier, as compared to Canada, locking down the country in most cases, prohibiting movement across border and putting in place more comprehensive 'testing and tracing' strategies.

Medical Equipment (Lower Mainland British Columbia Newcomers, Montreal Youth, Quebec Small Towns (second group), Lower Mainland British Columbia, Rural Quebec Seniors, Edmonton, Montreal)

Most participants held the view that Canada was not as prepared as it could have been with respect to having an inventory on hand of personal protective equipment (PPE) for health care workers or enough COVID-19 testing capacity. One of the key areas of concern identified by many of participants was that the bulk of the medical equipment is imported. This exacerbates participants' concerns about shortfalls, and about the ability of Canada to address the current shortages, let alone prepare for next phases. Some participants in certain locations (i.e., Southwestern Ontario) were, however, aware of initiatives underway by some Canadian companies to retool in order to be able to provide made-in-Canada medical equipment.

Few suggestions were forthcoming, when asked to identify the highest priority areas or items for additional medical equipment required to combat COVID-19. Nevertheless, a clear consensus

developed that the priority should be the provision of full PPE for health care workers and, possibly for all Canadians.

The use of masks by the general public was also a discussion point. As noted in other areas of this report, there was some confusion on this issue. Participants were unsure what the guidance was on masks as well as how they actually helped. Overall, few participants admitted to wearing masks in public and views were mixed as to whether it should be mandatory for travellers to wear masks on flights within Canada or in crowded places, such as grocery stores or public transit. Some were concerned that masks might result in giving those wearing them a false sense of security, leading to relaxation in other preventive measures and practices.

Participants in the B.C., Alberta and Quebec based focus groups were generally more positive about the preparedness of their hospitals and health care systems for a pandemic, especially from the point of view of the availability of medical equipment. Those in other groups who were more pessimistic had often had first-hand experience of health sector shortages and/or rationing.

Personal Impact (All Locations)

The pandemic is affecting participants in different ways. The degree to which they are affected depends to a large extent on their circumstances, including their living arrangements, age, social and family networks, and the type of community in which they live.

Few participants to the groups in April had personally experienced symptoms or knew of someone who had. Regardless, many participants felt they had a fairly good understanding of what to do if they developed the symptoms of COVID-19. Most would self-quarantine and, only if the symptoms got worse, would they seek additional medical assistance. A number of participants mentioned calling dedicated health lines, contacting their physician or checking online resources (i.e., self-assessment tools). At the same time, some participants in a number of groups seemed less clear about the steps to take should they begin to exhibit the symptoms of the virus. Specifically, the confusion appeared linked to their sense that information about what to do had likely evolved and, as a result, they felt they were not up-to-date.

Virtually all participants have altered their routine and behaviours in ways both minor and major. Most are practicing social distancing, self-isolation, disinfecting surfaces, washing items (i.e., fruits and vegetables), handwashing, and work-from-home (for those who remain employed). Venturing outdoors was limited typically to provisioning runs usually on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Relatively few spoke about wearing masks while grocery shopping or in places where they would find themselves in closer proximity to others, on an unprompted basis. Rather, the practice of social distancing was being employed quite religiously by most.

Parents were among the most vocal about the disruption to their routine and many spoke with clear concern about the burden of homeschooling young children in particular, requiring considerable supervision.

There was a clear sense that smaller communities, with lower density and more expansive access to outdoor spaces, would find it easier to maintain social distancing while still being able to enjoy some of their usual activities. However, others commented that small and rural communities may be more at risk of supply chain disruptions which could lead to food scarcity or less access to other resources that could be more readily available in larger centers.

Isolation and Social Distancing (All Locations)

Most participants in April were closely following social distancing measures and trying to stay at home as much as possible. When they did leave home, it was primarily for essential trips, such as to go to the grocery store, pick up medication, or to attend a medical appointment. Many were also getting outside for exercise or to entertain their children. The only exception to this was essential workers who were still going to work on most days.

Expectations as to how long Canadians would need to continue to follow social distancing varied between individuals across all groups. While few participants predicted the measures would be lifted in the near term (in May), many believed Canadians would be asked to continue with the current measures for another two or three months (June-August). Some suggested a longer time frame, such as up to a year, would be appropriate and acceptable, stating that they believed that directives would not be lifted until a vaccine was developed.

Due to the normalization of the social isolation and distancing behaviours over the previous month or more, most said they were prepared to continue to follow these measures for a few more months and had accepted that this was the new reality. However, doing so would come with challenges such as financial and emotional implications for many. In particular, participants who had been laid-off due to the pandemic said that, given their loss of income, it would be challenging to pay their bills, even if they were receiving the CERB. Others discussed impacts on mental health. In particular, parents with young children were finding it more difficult to manage with their children being home full time, including having to find activities to keep them entertained during the day and assisting children with their school work. Concerns among youth centered on the struggle in switching to online schooling for their post-secondary education and the scarcity of job prospects.

Many of the challenges above were also mentioned as “inconveniences” to participants’ day-to-day lives. Outside of the factors mentioned earlier, the primary inconvenience cited across all groups was the inability to visit with family, significant others (such as girlfriend or boyfriend), children (in cases of separated households), friends and other loved ones. It was clear that many were finding it difficult to maintain these personal relationships, although they were doing more to connect using online tools. Mentions of other inconveniences, with less frequency, included adjustments to their routine and inability to frequent places such as the hair salon, restaurants, or to obtain services including chiropractic or physiotherapy for injuries.

Impressions of the advice and information from the Government of Canada on social distancing measures varied over the month. At the beginning of April, participants were somewhat mixed in their views and those with more negative views said that the directives were “too broad” and “not strict

enough". Conversely, the groups towards the end of the month were overwhelmingly positive and felt that the federal government was providing all the information and advice they needed when it came to social distancing. Most preferred to see information coming through the usual channels, such as television and radio and a few Ontario participants mentioned liking that provincial messages were being delivered through the Amber Alert system. Social media was the most common mention in terms of the best way to connect with youth and young adults.

Lastly, tied in with stay-at-home directives, participants were asked about their awareness and views on the federal government using anonymized cell phone location data to help track and control social distancing during the pandemic. Awareness of this initiative was higher mid-month when the topic was more prevalent in the media, and less so towards the end of April where only a couple of participants in each group had heard about this issue. Participants' views on using this initiative were split right down the middle. About half supported the idea because they believed that the data was already being collected anyways and this would be a way to use it for the public good. The other half, who were opposed, expressed concerns around setting a precedent which would be unlikely to be discontinued once the pandemic had receded, citing issues around privacy and individuals' rights and freedoms. A few others simply felt it was a measure they did not deem to be necessary at that time.

Re-Opening (Edmonton, Montreal, Rural Quebec, Rural Atlantic)

Very few felt that COVID-19 was under control yet, either in Canada or globally. Accordingly, there was a high level of concern among most participants concerning any imminent re-opening of the economy and easing of social distancing measures. Rural Quebecers were the most ready to begin re-opening, while many others felt it could be weeks to months, depending on the circumstances, before it was safe. In the Edmonton and Atlantic groups, in particular, participants were wary, even in the event of reassurance from medical experts. Many in these groups agreed with the idea of keeping strict social distancing in place until there were either no more cases in Canada or a vaccine was found, if that was what it took to get and keep the virus under control. That said, many also had concerns about the prospect of a lengthy shut down and the impacts this would have on the economy and people's lives.

Beyond some difference in opinion about readiness and timing, participants in all groups supported a cautious and gradual approach to re-opening, with some degree of physical distancing remaining in place, or new precautions, such as obligatory mask wearing in shops and businesses, being implemented to reduce risks.

Most felt that the provinces were in the best position to determine the timing and approach in their jurisdictions, but wanted to see a national plan and federal guidelines in place as well. Priorities for re-opening included increasing access to non-urgent health care, loosening restrictions on physical distancing among extended family members, and re-opening outdoor areas, such as parks and trails, to allow for increased physical activity and the opportunity to be outdoors as the weather improved.

Message Testing for Re-opening (Rural Quebec, Rural Atlantic)

Responses to federal government messaging about social and economic reopening was somewhat distinct between these two groups, which aligned, to some degree, with differing attitudes regarding the loosening of pandemic-related restrictions.

In the Quebec group, participants were more supportive of an imminent reopening. They tended to respond most positively to messages focused on a slow and cautious approach, the removal of restrictions on health care access for those with non-COVID related issues, and keeping precautions in place to ensure that vulnerable populations were protected.

Among participants in the Atlantic group, where there was a higher degree of concern about easing pandemic-related restrictions any time soon, participants widely agreed that the most important information related to precautions remaining in place, the need to continue following restrictions, cautions about asymptomatic spread, and clear directives for anyone experiencing symptoms to contact public health or get tested. Participants in this group also liked the inclusion of an appreciative message from government that acknowledged the efforts made by Canadians to reduce the spread.

Economic Impact (All Locations)

COVID-19 economic news

Participants were highly attuned to the COVID-related impacts on the economy. Most commonly, they were paying attention to job losses, negative impacts on businesses and industry, and the economic and financial initiatives being implemented by the Canadian government.

Economic concerns

Most expressed a high degree of concern about the impacts of COVID-19 on the economy and felt that they were already wide ranging and likely to be long lasting. Many were concerned about the survival of businesses, especially small and community-based businesses, such as shops and restaurants, as well as the health of key sectors such as travel and tourism, and the impact on jobs. Participants also expressed concern about consumer prices going up, the potential for supply chains to be affected, and declining value of their personal portfolios. While not especially widespread, there was some top of mind concern about the impact of economic disruption and emergency government spending on the deficit. Where participants were asked about this directly, however, most felt that the relief being provided by the government was more important at this time.

Personal financial impact

Participants were facing a diverse set of circumstances with regard to employment and financial security, but most said they had been affected financially, in one way or another, as a result of the economic shut down. By contrast, for those whose income had not been affected, the overall impact was positive, as they found themselves saving money.

A significant number of participants, however, had seen a decline in their household income (and were receiving either Employment Insurance or the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit). Few of these participants felt prepared to manage through an extended economic shut down or downturn. Some were drawing on limited savings, or were just getting by, while others were going into debt and/or facing significant short-term worries about paying for rent and other basic necessities, especially those in single-income households. Even among these more financially secure participants, most were feeling heightened anxiety about what the future might hold for the economy, and themselves, longer term.

Government of Canada response

Awareness

There was a high level of general awareness of the Government of Canada's actions to provide emergency support for the economy, businesses, and households. Participants widely understood that the federal government was mounting a multi-billion-dollar effort, overall, with new programs being announced on an ongoing basis. In regard to specific initiatives, participants were commonly familiar with the \$2,000 per month being offered through the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and the wage subsidy for small business. Many were also aware of a supplement being made available to the child benefit, and initiatives like the deferrals of taxes and mortgage payments. Where there were gaps in awareness or information, a number of participants were still unsure whether or not they qualified for some of these programs, including the CERB and child benefit, and among Montreal youth, there was no awareness of the Summer Jobs Program initiative. Among participants in Edmonton, about half had heard of the recent announcement regarding funding for orphan wells.

Perceptions

Participants in general had quite positive views of the Government of Canada's economic response to date and felt that it was doing a good job, overall, at getting relief out quickly to those who needed it, especially in regard to the CERB. The main exception to this overall positive view was among general public participants in the Western groups, who were more critical, in general, about gaps in support. In Edmonton, in particular, there was a sense that the government needed to mount a more targeted and extensive response for Alberta, given the struggles it was already facing in regard to the oil and gas industry. Few felt that the orphan wells initiative would make much of a difference.

With regard to additional economic and financial actions required by the federal government, there were a range of suggestions but no strong consensus about how to address specific gaps. Recommendations ranged from undertaking longer term planning and programs, to filling gaps in existing programs, and clearing up any confusion about eligibility for the CERB, in particular, to avoid any confusion or surprise claw backs at tax time. There was some commentary about the need to provide more support to students, including recent graduates hoping to find work, deferring carbon pricing, and bolstering support for key sectors, such as travel, tourism, and restaurants.

COVID-19 Ad Testing (Quebec Small Town groups, Greater Toronto Area Parents, Lower Mainland British Columbia Newcomers, Montreal Youth, Southwest Ontario, Lower Mainland British Columbia, Rural Quebec Seniors, Edmonton, Montreal)

There were five ad concepts tested in this phase of the research, from scripts to video, in both English and French. Most were intended for television, and in two instances for radio. Four of these concepts were designed to communicate with the public about the importance of stay-at-home directives, using different approaches and spokespeople to get that message across. One of the ads was focussed on communicating about the financial support being made available to businesses and individuals by the federal government.

Overall findings

Participants were largely favourable in their response to these ads. They felt that they were appropriate coming from the federal government and communicated important information to the public. Participants also widely demonstrated ready comprehension of their main messages and viewed the ads as clear and easy-to-understand.

Most participants were already attuned to the advertising coming from the federal government regarding COVID-19, primarily on measures related to reducing the spread of the virus. Those least likely to recall advertising from the Government of Canada, specifically, were in the Quebec groups and among newcomers in British Columbia. Even here, however, participants were highly familiar with public health directives coming from all levels of government.

In regard to comprehension, this familiarity was a plus and primed participants for the advertising. Participants were not only familiar with stay-at-home directives to reduce the transmission of the virus but agreed with them, and had changed their daily lives to comply. In regard to impact, however, this was viewed as creating a challenge for the advertising to break through. Participants widely felt that they had seen and heard these messages before, which to a certain extent tempered the degree to which some said they would take notice of ads focussed on stay-at-home directives, in particular, or be motivated to take action. A number of participants felt that these messages were not intended for them, and very few said it was likely that they would visit the Government of Canada website dedicated to COVID-19 to seek out more information.

That said, the creative approach of these ads was largely effective in bringing a fresh take to familiar messages. The use of celebrities, medical experts, astronauts or average people as spokespeople worked well, overall, as techniques for increasing their impact. Similarly, having spokespeople record their messages from home was also widely viewed as an unusual element of most of these ads that would make them stand out. Moreover, ancillary messaging focused on shared values, Canadian resilience, and collective sacrifice for loved ones and the social good added to the perceived purpose of the ads resonated with many. Pointed language describing COVID-19 as a serious, life-and-death issue also got participants' attention (and was widely viewed as both accurate and appropriate), as did information about asymptomatic spread.

As noted below, some ads worked better than others with different groups.

Concept A: Celebrities

TV script

Most liked this ad for its simplicity, clear message and, in particular, its use of a range of well-known Canadians as spokespeople. Participants felt that this approach would help the ad get attention and appeal to a wide range of Canadians. They also viewed it as sending a message about Canadians from all walks of life coming together to stop the spread of the virus. The use of celebrities, however, did not resonate with everyone equally. Some felt it was not serious enough, while others, especially in the Quebec groups, where recall of federal government advertising was low, liked the atypical approach for a government ad. A number of participants felt that the ad would be improved by including at least one celebrity targeted at young people.

Concept B: Medical Experts

TV script and video

Many viewed this ad concept as more credible and serious than the celebrity ad, and more effective as a result. They also widely felt that this ad was more informative, with its emphasis on asymptomatic spread and the seriousness of COVID-19 as a life and death issue. For those in the Quebec group, however, where this ad was compared to the celebrity concept above, it was viewed as more typical of government messaging on COVID-19, with its use of experts to advise the public, and less noticeable as a result. In groups where this ad was compared to the astronaut concept below, most felt that it would be more effective at convincing people to stay at home, given its range of spokespeople, which was perceived to appeal to a wider range of people, and due to the medical expertise of these spokespeople.

Concept C: Astronauts

TV and radio script

Participants generally liked the use of a first-person account from an astronaut comparing social isolation during the pandemic to their experience in space. They found the message empathetic and authentic, and those who were familiar with either Chris Hadfield or David St-Jacques, felt an added personal connection to them. The tenor of the message itself, with its focus on loved ones and endurance, resonated as well, and amplified the intimate and encouraging quality of the ad, as did the filming from home. Montreal youth especially liked this ad concept and tended to feel it was more effective in speaking to them than the ad featuring medical experts, when asked to compare the two.

Concept D: Financial

TV video

Most participants liked this ad and message about financial assistance being made available to individuals and businesses by the federal government. Participants were widely aware of these efforts but still felt that the ad offered important information to the public, as well as an encouraging message about the federal government helping the country get through a temporary economic crisis. The charm of the animation and community vignette, which offered a glimpse into people's home and showed the resumption of activity on a shopping street, resonated with most. In the Montreal group, in particular, which was one of two groups to view the more finished version of the ad, participants especially liked the diversity of the people depicted and the familiarity of one of the business names (Tremblay) on the shopping street. In Edmonton, on the other hand, which was the other group to view the near-finished version of the ad, there was less receptivity to the ad, overall, and its optimistic tone, based on an underlying sentiment that the federal government was not doing enough to assist people and businesses hurt by the pandemic-related shut downs. Participants in this group were also less receptive to the animation and depiction of the community, which they found to be impersonal or generic. In this English version of the ad, there were no names included on the businesses, which may have contributed to this view.

Concept E: Experience

Radio script

This ad, with its personal story and focus on consequences, had emotional impact. In the testing of previous ads, in fact, a number of participants mentioned, unprompted, that an average person with first-hand experience of COVID-19 would be a good spokesperson in their view for stay-at-home messages, and more relatable than celebrities or medical experts. This ad succeeded on that front. Most found it authentic and effective. Participants widely assumed that this ad was directed specifically at young people, and delivered a necessary message about personal vulnerability among this group of Canadians, who otherwise might not be taking the virus or social distancing directives as seriously as they should.

Virtual Parliament (Rural Quebec, Rural Atlantic)

Participants were told that under pandemic-related restrictions, the Parliament of Canada was unable to hold regular sessions. With that in mind, they were asked to consider which alternate approach might be better: smaller sessions with only a small fraction of all Members of Parliament present, or parliamentary sessions hosted virtually via webcams.

Responses were somewhat split. Some of the Quebec participants and most in the Atlantic group felt that virtual sessions would likely be a better idea, as long as they could be done securely. Quite a few in the Quebec, group, however, had concerns about cyber security and the possibility that virtual sessions, and the video platforms used to accommodate them, could be hacked. Some assumed that these sessions would include the discussion of confidential or secret information. Some also felt that in-person sessions and meetings, in general, were simply a more effective means of discussing or debating the issues of parliament and resolving differences of opinion.

Other Federal Government News and Issues (Rural Quebec, Rural Atlantic)

Asked if they had heard recently about any federal government issues unrelated to the pandemic, a few across both groups mentioned pipelines, generally, or the Wet'suwet'en protests and blockades. Others said that they had not heard about any other issues.

Most felt that the focus on COVID-19 by the Government of Canada at this time was entirely appropriate, given its impact on the country and global proportions. There was some agreement in the Quebec group that this focus was bringing the country together and having a salutary effect on the tenor of public affairs. Some in the Atlantic group, however, added that they would like to see the scope of the discussion around COVID-19 and its impacts expanded to include a broader set of issues, including those related to the criminal justice system, mental health and domestic abuse. The one participant in the Quebec who thought that there was too much focus on COVID-19 at the moment attributed it to the media and not the government.

MORE INFORMATION

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