

Canada's francophones slower to adopt new technology, report finds

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TORONTO -- Francophone Canadians tend to lag their anglophone counterparts when it comes to adopting new technologies, according to research by the Media Technology Monitor.

It's a trend that researchers have observed for years and it was evident again after polling thousands of Canadians this spring, said director of research and analysis Mark Allen.

"Certainly in terms of technology adoption the rule of thumb is francophones tend to lag a little bit. I don't think it's a cultural thing, I think it's because they're in a different language and they often get service later than others," says Allen.

"It's harder for francophones to adopt technology because they can buy the technology but they don't have the services to go along with it."

MTM surveyed 2,000 anglophones and 2,000 francophones by phone in March and April and compared how respondents said they used technology in their day-to-day lives. The results are considered accurate within 2.2 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

About 34 per cent of the anglophone respondents said they had a tablet, versus just 20 per cent of the francophones polled. While 19 per cent of anglophones said they owned an ebook reader, just four per cent of francophones had one.

Ann-Louise Davidson, an associate professor in educational technology with Concordia University, said she wasn't surprised by the lower tech usage among francophones, which she attributed to more than one factor.

"You can't just point to one single cause, there's a systemic amount of reasons that can explain the variation," said Davidson, citing lower incomes in Quebec and difficulties in accessing French-language content.

"Quebec is not the richest province, so you would automatically see that depending on people's salary, if there's a million people working at minimum wage or less, you're obviously not going to get a massive amount of the population that owns tablets and smartphones," she said.

"It's something I've noticed in less wealthy areas of Montreal. When you walk in a cafe you'll see people with a lot of cheaper computers or older phones and when you walk into the more wealthy areas you'll find people with Apple products and sometimes they'll have a (MacBook) there and an iPad and an iPhone."

While Netflix has become very popular in Canada, only five per cent of francophones said they were subscribers, versus 25 per cent of anglophones. It's not a surprising finding given there's far more English content available to stream on the service.

Watching TV on a smartphone is still a rarity among all Canadians but anglophones were almost twice as likely to be streaming content on the go. About nine per cent of anglophones reported watching TV on their mobiles versus five per cent of francophones.

The abundance of high-quality English web content simply isn't available for francophones, Davidson said, adding french-speakers struggle to find everything from entertainment content to educational resources.

Francophones risk being left behind in the digital revolution if they insist on relying solely on sometimes inferior French resources, she said.

"If you think about it, the Internet is English. Applications are in English, the web is English," she said.

"I identify myself with the francophone population but in no way, shape or form would I ever reject the fact that English is the language of business.

"Of course you need to reach out to other French communities online but it remains that if you speak French and you only refer to French references, French software, you will be at a disadvantage in this world of technology."